# GEORGE of LYDDA

## *Soldier Saint & Martyr*

I. HILL ELDER

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# GEORGE OF LYDDA

ST. GEORGE

From a painting by Edward John Gregory, the English Painter (1850-1909)

*Picture Post Library*

# GEORGE OF LYDDA

## Soldier, Saint and Martyr

BY

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
FLORENCE A. DE STE CROIX
WHOSE INTEREST IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
AFFORDED ME ENCOURAGEMENT
AND WHOSE FRIENDSHIP
WAS AN INSPIRATION

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"A noble human life does not end on earth with death. It continues in the minds and the deeds of friends, as well as in the thoughts and activities of the nation."

"Truly great men are such as have rendered a greatness like their own less necessary to successive generations." *Madame de Staël.*

"Each has his own message to deliver; each has his own work to perform; each is a link in that manifold chain which conveys the electric spark from the first to the present century." *Dean Stanley.*

"He who tramples on the past does not create for the future." *Ed. Davies.*

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## OUR DAY

Spring brings the day when England's flag is hoisted high and bright: the Easter sign—a blood red cross upon a field of white . . . England, mother of the Celto-Saxon-breeds—Islanded, made separate from Continental creeds—celebrates upon her day the good and glorious name: George of Lydda, who in our crusading days became England's patron, soldier-saint though centuries had passed—since St. George's martyrdom, unyielding, holding fast—to the faith in that far province of the Holy Land—a valiant soul, he suffered death at pagan Rome's command.

On this day when George of Lydda's banner is unfurled—We, the English, unashamed are proud to tell the world—that Shakespeare on this day was born, the greatest bard on earth. This day we commemorate a dying and a birth.

Patience Strong

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# INTRODUCTION

by

The Rt. Hon. the Lord Queenborough, g.b.e.
President of the Royal Society of St. George

One imagines that that great Englishman and traditionalist Gilbert Chesterton must have found something ironically amusing in the facts that the Patron Saint of England, St. George, has been consistently confused in the English mind with another character of the same name, and that the great symbol of English chivalry, King Arthur, is held never to have existed, or, at best, to have been a Welshman.

Mrs. Isabel Hill Elder in her book has done a valuable service in clearing away the mists of unsupported legend, and the fog of legend-antipathy, which has surrounded these two towering names. With enviable industry and even more enviable scholarship she presents here the fruits of long and deep research, and she makes no assertion about either our militant saint or the King of Chivalry which she does not support from the stores of her erudition.

John Ruskin, it is true, in one issue of his unique series of letters, *Fors Clavigera,* did much to disentangle the popular mind and dissipate the confusion between George of Cappadocia and our own Saint George. The Cappadocian, who was half a century younger than our Patron Saint, was a man of mixed

character and dubious reputation, very different indeed from the true saint and martyr of which this book tells.

What Ruskin did necessarily briefly and—comparatively speaking—sketchily, Mrs. Elder does in detail and very painstakingly. Not only does she expound the significance of St. George's life, but she makes the incidents of that life vivid and real.

It may be wondered why in one book the characters of St. George and King Arthur are linked, apart from the outstanding affinity the names have as great champions of Christian practice and chivalry. With something of the shock of a child reading a fairy tale, one realises in Mrs. Elder's pages that between the two is a mystic link in the symbolism of the dragon. No chapter in Mrs. Elder's book is, perhaps, more fascinating than that in which the significance of the dragon in legend and mythology is explored and explained. And—and this is important—Mrs. Elder is able to say with authority that: After Constantine the Great it is to the British King Arthur that we owe the preservation of the memory of St. George, whose charming qualities of mind and heart appealed with irresistible force to a prince no less Christian.

As with her treatment of St. George, Mrs. Elder's treatment of King Arthur is remarkable for the patience and research with which fact, legend, and accretions to legend, are discovered, exposed, expounded and sorted one from the other, so that the reader is enabled to study the actualities, and finally to view clearly the historic figure and all that it has meant to the changing generations of men.

In our time a book such as this is badly needed. We

have come to an age where all kinds of scepticism are rife, but where there burns steadily still a deep-rooted belief in the Faith and a firm affection for all the adornments by means of which Christian doctrine through the ages has been conveyed and made acceptable to minds unable without parable and symbol to comprehend its mysteries. Never in our history were exemplars such as St. George and King Arthur more greatly needed to re-inspire and re-invigorate us. To learn, beyond dispute, that some of the stirring and lovely legends of our race are not mere myths, however delightful, but transmissions of actual historic fact is to experience a quickening of that emotion which makes us the latest bearers of the great standard of Christendom at a time when the Dragon of unbelief and evil is again abroad in all lands.

In commending Mrs. Elder's sincere and scholarly book I acknowledge not only the work which has gone to its making, but the inspiration which caused an author so well equipped to devote herself to the task.

## PREFACE

In the present day, although England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland still maintain devotion each to its own Patron Saint, St. George has come to represent in a general way Britain—the British Isles.

As a result of research by hagiographers and historians, no competent authority now doubts the fact of the historic George of Lydda. The accounts of miracle-working incidents and fabulous tales tenaciously held by the popular mind in medieval times are, in our day, so manifestly unreal that modern sceptics, having missed established facts, scarcely escape the temptation to relegate all that pertains to St. George, both truth and fiction, to the realm of the mythical.

While rejecting the legendary accretions which have accumulated in great profusion around the simple story of his life, an effort has been made in the following pages to bring together the historical notices of St. George to be found in British annals and elsewhere.

It should be made clear to the reader that there was another George with whom our Patron Saint is often confused. C. J. Marcus says: "Gibbon identifies St. George with the disreputable George of Cappadocia—a case of mistaken identity which has persisted ever since." Mommsen also: "The historian Edward Gibbon did the character of the saint much harm. Gibbon confounded two wholly distinct men, George who was born in Epiphania in Cilicia, and

George of Lydda"; and Hepworth Dixon on the same theme: "We have had two St. Georges in history and to our shame we have made them one, and we have been indolently content to let our greatest historical writer, Gibbon, describe him as one of the vilest scamps and darkest villains who ever stained this earth with crime."

This George, of disrepute, often called the Cappadocian, actually, however, of Laodicea, Arian Archbishop of Alexandria from A.D. 356 to 361, was born about fifty years after the true St. George. After many wanderings in which he amassed a fortune, first as an army contractor, then as a receiver of taxes, he reached Alexandria, where, in A.D. 356 he was elevated by the prevailing Arian faction to the vacant See. Brutal in character, his persecution of orthodox Christians incensed against him the people he had robbed, and finally his death was compassed by the infuriated mob.

A study of the life of our Patron Saint reveals that the traditions of St. George are in accord with the documentary evidence extant, that as soldier he is justly honoured, as saint justly esteemed, and as martyr justly reverenced.

It is right, therefore, that we should give our forefathers the credit of having kept active in our national life the memory of one who was indeed worthy to be our Patron Saint. When the true history of St. George is better known this nation will not be slow to accord him the place not of a mere legendary hero, but that which she has ever reserved for the noble and chivalrous among her own sons. I. H. E.

*Coleraine,*
*Co. Derry.*

"Misbelievers have written
Misbelief in their books
Touching the Saint
That Georgius hight.
Now will we teach you
What is true thereabout
That heresy harm not
Any unwittingly.
The holy Georgius
Was in heathenish days
A rich eorldorman
Under the fierce Caesar Datianus
In the shire of Cappadocia."

AELFRIC, ARCHBISHOP OF YORK, A.D. 1020-1050.
*The Passion of St. George.*

CHAPTER I

# SOLDIER AND MARTYR

FORTUNATE in his Christian parentage and in the surroundings in which he grew up, St. George, born at Lydda, in Palestine, in the year A.D. 280, came into a heritage rich in all things that pertain to worldly honour.[1]

The ancient city of Lydda is situated in the beautiful plain of Sharon, twelve miles from the port of Joppa or Jaffa, and twenty-three miles from Jerusalem. One traveller says: "I have often been sadly disappointed in approaching an old Bible city, which fancy had somehow decked in the choicest beauties of nature and art, but which reality transformed into mud hovels on a rocky hillside. It was not so with Lydda. Even now, though its glory is gone, Lydda has an imposing look. It is embowered in verdure. Olive groves encircle it and stretch far out over the surrounding plain, and their dusky hue is relieved here and there by the brighter foliage of the apricot and mulberry; while, near to the houses, vines are seen creeping over garden walls and clambering up the great gnarled trunks and branches of the walnut trees. The village stands on a gentle eminence. High above its terraced roofs rise the splendid ruins of England's Patron Saint. Lydda was the native place of St. George; and England's chivalrous king, the lion-hearted Richard, built in his honour this noble

[1] *Petits Bollandistes.*

church, the ruins of which now form the chief attraction of Lydda."[2]

In the plain of Sharon, reputed the most verdant spot in Palestine, St. George spent his boyhood. His mother, the daughter of the Count of Lydda, and a descendant of "the saints that dwelt at Lydda" who were visited by St. Peter, a visit which resulted in the conversion of "all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon",[3] was a well-known and exemplary Christian. His father, also of an extended Christian ancestry, of a noble Cappadocian family, an officer of great wealth in the army of Diocletian, died at the age of thirty-six when George was but ten years old.

The fullest details of the soldier-martyr's early life have come down to us in the form of Encomiums. Of these the most interesting is that of the Abba Theodotus, recorded in the Coptic Texts of contemporary writers, translated by Sir Wallis Budge,[4] who states in the preface to his *George of Lydda*: "Scholars generally believed that if the versions which were known to exist in Syriac, Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic were made available for study, both the texts and translation of them into some modern languages, the true history of the saint whose cult was so widespread would be better known. . . . The translation has been made as literal as possible. . . . An attempt has been made to summarise the facts proving the existence of the real historical St. George which have been collected by students of his life and martyrdom from the time of Peter Heylyn (1633)."

[2] F. L. Porter, D.D., *Syria's Holy Places.*
[3] Acts IX: 32-35.
[4] Brit. Mus. M.S. Orient. No. 713 (Wright Catalogue, 191).

Of the historical records of the life of St. George the following Encomium of Theodotus, Bishop of Ancyra, is the fullest and most detailed, for therein is shown the origin and family of the soldier-martyr who won the admiration and reverence of the early Christian Church.

"St. George the Martyr, the mighty man of the Galileans of Militene, and the valiant soldier of Christ, was the son of the Governor of Diospolis (Lydda). His father, an exceedingly orthodox man, died and left the righteous man, then ten years old, and his two sisters, one of whom was called Kasia, and the other Matterona. Now they were exceedingly rich in gold and silver, and they had menservants and maidservants in exceeding numbers and immense herds of cattle and fine horses and countless flocks of sheep. In short, there was none like unto them in all Palestine and its borders, and all the City loved them because of the goodness which they wrought each one.

"Shortly after the death of St. George's father a new governor was appointed over the country of Palestine in his stead (Justus), and he was a great lover of God and he knew the rank of the righteous man and the good birth of his parents. When he came into the city of Lydda with a mighty following such as befitted his dignity he sent and fetched the youth, St. George, and condoled with him on the death of his father, and afterwards he entreated his mother to give him St. George that he might be to him a son, and that at the end of his military training he might appoint him General over his multitude of soldiers, and she gave him, and when of age he sent

him to the Emperor (Diocletian) with one hundred soldiers, and wrote to the Emperor concerning him, and shewed him his rank and the good birth of his parents. When the Emperor had read the letter, he rejoiced in St. George greatly, and in a short time appointed him General over five thousand men, and wrote down that he should receive three thousand pieces of money of Government besides his taxes for the public treasury which was remitted to him, and the Emperor sent him back to the Eparch with much royal pomp.

"When St. George came back to his house the whole city and the Eparch came out to meet him, and they carried him into his house with great joy. On the morrow his mother spread out a feast for the whole city, rich and poor alike, small and great, and she distributed much money among the widows and orphans, and made a great feast for them three whole days.

"When St. George had completed his twentieth year he was so exceeding strong and valiant that he was the leader in battle, and there was no one among all the company of soldiers who could be compared with him for strength and beauty. And the grace of God was with him, and He gave him beauty and strength that all those who saw him marvelled at his power and youth . . . and God was with him in all his ways."

The MSS. of contemporary date agree with the traditional history of St. George; they record a youth "of much beauty of person and an exquisite courtesy". Such was the foundation upon which was built the character of the Patron Saint of England; the soldier-

martyr without compeer in the annals of Christian history.

From his first military appointment St. George enjoyed the favour of the Emperor Diocletian, who sought to recompense the loyal services of his father by advancing the son in a series of rapid promotions, until finally he made him military tribune of the Imperial Guard.[5]

St. George served under Galerius in the Persian campaign, which lasted two years; and is said at the end of hostilities to have taken up his residence at Beirut as a wealthy patrician or tribune of the people.

His sojourn there was of sufficient duration to permit of his name being associated for all time with Beirut (Beyrout). Its bay is still known as the Bay of St. George.

His companion-in-arms, Constantine, returned to his father Constantius at York, where he is believed to have remained until after the death of his father in that city A.D. 306.

St. George in the course of his military duties at Beirut appears to have been sent by Diocletian on an expedition to Britain. Of many Roman legions and auxiliary cohorts which came over to Britain from the Continent and Palestine we have little record, least of all the expedition sent by Diocletian, the Roman Empire being on the wane since the division of the Empire into four parts, and never revived even under its consolidation by Constantine the Great.

The tradition which associates St. George with Britain is meagre in the extreme. Dr. Clapton suggests that St. George sailed through the Irish Sea, sub-

[5] *Petits Bollandistes.*

sequently known as St. George's Channel, and landed at Porta Sisuntiorum, which was then the only port on that part of the coast, afterwards called the County of Lancaster.[6]

Arrived at his immediate destination, the Court of Constantius Chlorus at York, and the home of his comrade-in-arms, Constantine, the welcome extended to the young Christian soldier by the Empress Helena can be imagined. This traditional visit to York was given a lasting commemoration, for over its gate still hangs the shield blazoned with the heraldry of its prime—the Red Cross on the silver ground—the sign of St. George.[7]

Of the duties deputed to St. George in Britain there is no record. The traditions of this expedition centre round the church at Glastonbury to which at that time and through the centuries up to the Reformation pilgrimages were made on account of its reputed sanctity as the first church in Britain. The native Church of Britain had, from its inception, grown steadily and spread to all parts of the country; the zealous young Christian, St. George, would find fellowship among the British Christians, and according to tradition made a pilgrimage to Glastonbury, the burial-place of Joseph of Arimathea, whose home Rama, or Arimathea, was in close proximity to his own at Lydda—some authorities say Joseph was his kinsman. Local tradition also associates the name of St. George with Caerleon-on-Usk on the other side of the Severn, the headquarters of the second Roman legion and most probably connected with the military expedition on which he was engaged.

[6] *Life of St. George.*
[7] G. P. Baker: *Constantine the Great.*

Caerleon-on-Usk was, in the Roman division of the country, the capital of Britannia Secunda. Here the Roman Governor resided, and had his palace; here also the courts were held where the Imperial edicts were promulgated. By the Romans it was called Isca Colonia and Civitas Legionis II Augustae. "Those cities which had the title of Augusta conferred upon them were the chief metropoles of the province"[8] Giraldus Cambrensus, twelfth century, writing of its remains in his time attests its pristine magnificence and mentions "immense palaces with gilded roofs". Here, before the Roman invasion, Caradoc held his court. It was the seat of an Archdruid and subsequently became an Archiepiscopal See, the change-over from Druidism to Christianity having taken place about the year A.D. 182. Caerleon-on-Usk was, therefore, a place of importance from a remote age.

St. George, with his fellow Christians in Caerleon, received with consternation the publication of the Edict of Diocletian for the extermination of the Christians.

For some years the persecution had raged on the continent of Europe, now it was extended to Britain.

With Diocletian, St. George had ever been on terms of friendship, and it was with full reliance on that friendship that the young soldier decided to go direct to the Emperor and plead for the lives of his fellow Christians and to obtain for them, if possible, freedom of worship. Without delay he returned to Lydda, freed his slaves, sold his possessions with the exception of his house at Lydda, and distributed the proceeds amongst his household. Two of his servants he

[8] Marc Velserus: *Res. Vindel.* Lib. V.

retained besides his body servant, Pasicrates. To this faithful and devoted servant we owe much of the knowledge we possess of the subsequent happenings to the soldier-saint whom he calls Mar George or Lord George.

According to Gibbon, Christianity grew and flourished during the first twenty years of the reign of Diocletian, and it was not until Galerius had conquered the Persians that any serious check was put upon Christianity. Diocletian as the elder and supreme Emperor was an active, benevolent, clear-sighted statesman and ruler, but also a zealous adherent of the old religion. As such he was inclined to hold Christianity responsible for many of the internal troubles of his kingdom. He was restrained from interfering with the Christians, however, by the policy of toleration which had now prevailed for some time, and by the political consideration of the vast number of the Christian population; yet the incessant importunities and whispered suspicions of Galerius were not without success. In A.D. 298 he issued the decree that all soldiers should take part in the sacrificial rites; he thus obliged all Christian soldiers to withdraw from the army.

Galerius finally prevailed upon the Emperor to order a general persecution, yet even then Diocletian persisted that in it no blood should be shed. An edict was issued forbidding all Christian assemblies and ordering the destruction of churches, the burning of the sacred Scriptures, and depriving Christians of their offices and civil rights.[9]

Stripped of his armour, military rank and worldly

[9] Kurtz: *Church History,* 22-26.

possessions, St. George prepared to take the journey to Nicomedia on the shores of the Bosphorous (now Izmidt), where the Emperor Diocletian had gone from Rome to pass the winter with Galerius Maximus, Emperor of the East, and to confer with him as to their future course with regard to the Christians.[10]

There is very little trace of any mass of pagan public opinion hostile to the Christians. Their persecution was almost entirely an official one. The Christian habit of giving rather than seeking to acquire was certainly among the novelties which impressed the public opinion of the Roman age.

Constantine stated that when very young he heard Diocletian express himself respecting "those righteous ones on earth", and that one of the pagan priests then present replied that they were the Christians.[11]

At Nicomedia fire broke out in the Imperial palace; Galerius blamed the Christians. The persecution then began to rage throughout the whole Roman Empire. The Coptic texts describe Galerius as being more wicked than any other man upon earth at that time, and it is well known that he was the first and principal cause of the persecution.

One of the writers of the Coptic texts tells us of the alarm with which the soldier-saint's friends viewed his project to go direct to the Emperor, and that he "bid them farewell" and said: "If ye are alive and hear that I am dead, do me the kindness for Christ's sake to take my body to my native city (Lydda) and there bury it."

Arrived at the Eastern Court to plead for a remit-

[10] E. P. Baker: *Constantine the Great*, p. 70.
[11] Eus. H.E., Bk. II, Ch.LI.

tance of the edicts against the Christians, St. George was a witness of their publication in Nicomedia as he had been in Britain. The day after the demolition of the Church at Nicomedia the edicts against the Eastern Christians were passed. The first was directed against the property of the Christians and the second against their lives and the churches. Under the edicts now passed 38,000 Christians in the Eastern Empire were slain.

Eusebius states that "The moment the decree against the churches was published a certain person, by no means obscure, but most highly honoured, as the world counts pre-eminence, moved by zeal towards God and carried away by his burning faith seized and tore it to pieces where posted up in an open and public place, as an unholy and profane thing, while two Emperors were present in the same city, the senior of them all (Diocletian) and he who held the fourth place in the Government after him (Galerius). But this man (St. George) was the first of those at that time who thus distinguished himself, and, at the same time, in his endurance of such results as naturally followed a daring act of this kind, he maintained an untroubled and undisturbed demeanour to his very last breath."[12]

St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (A.D. 374-97), on the same incident expresses himself thus: "George, the most faithful soldier of Jesus Christ, when religion was by others concealed, alone adventured to confess the name of God, whose heavenly grace infused such constancy into him that he not only scorned the tyrants, but contemned their torments."[13]

[12] Eus. H.E., Vol. II, p. 264.
[13] Ambrose of Milan: *Liber Praefationem.*

St. George, the valiant defender of the Christians, appealed to Diocletian—but in vain. He was carried before Galerius and the sixty-nine nobles or governors who sat with him on the judgment seat of the great Roman Basilica of the Eastern Capital, Nicomedia.

Thenceforth for some years St. George suffered imprisonment and periodical trials before pagan governors. Numerous forms of torture were employed to weaken the saint's resistance, and to induce him to sacrifice to the Roman gods.[14]

According to Theodotus of Ancyra, the instruments of torture were publicly displayed, and "those who saw them did not wish to suffer torture, and they withdrew themselves through the fear of the machines. And when those who loved God heard this decree the hearts of many of them melted because of the great evil which had risen up against the Churches. And no man dared say 'I am a Christian' because of his fear of the great number of the instruments of torture. And there was great sorrow and lamentation in all the ends of the world and there was not found anywhere one man who made mention of the name of God with his mouth."

Bishop Theodotus goes on to state that these were the conditions when St. George arrived in Nicomedia, and that he was "stupified" in his heart for a long time. Then this Mar George, the shining star, who had the title of Tarbinus (i.e. Tribune), declared before Galerius and the Governors: "I am a Christian; I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"; and they all wanted to overcome the saint, and to turn his mind away from the glorious worship, but they were unable

[14] Sir Wallis Budge: *George of Lydda*, p. 23.

to vanquish him, and his love for God the Most High, the Blessed One, did not diminish. Dadianus (Galerius) next tried persuasion, saying, "Behold now, it is apparent from thy handsome form that thou art a nobleman and a great man. Know now that I love the beauty of thy face. For myself, although I have been sitting in this place for the last three years, I have never in all these three years heard a voice like thine which said 'I am a Christian', and it was because of this that I thought within myself that thou wast a nobleman and a great man, and thy bold mien and the multitude of thy possessions leadeth me to this conclusion; and it is because of these things that thou makest a mock of the Kings and their armies which are gathered together round about them. . . . It is not us alone whom thou hast blasphemed, but also our gods, and thou hast denied their divinity. From this very moment it will be fitting in respect of us to abandon this kind of speech; repent, and make submission with thy whole heart, and bow down and worship the gods. And we Kings will welcome thee, and we will treat thee as if thou wast an only son, and thou shalt receive from us and from our gods great honours and royal rank, and thou shalt be the governor of ten of the greatest cities of the world, with their provinces and their peoples."

At one point Galerius brought St. George to his palace as a guest, hoping by this friendly gesture to win him over to the pagan side.

One day the Queen, Alexandra, heard St. George reciting a psalm, the second psalm, and presently the seventy-seventh psalm. The Queen said to him: "What is the meaning of these words you have

uttered?" St. George, in true missionary spirit, revealed to her the truths of the Scriptures and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which led in a short time to her conversion. Alexandra's husband, Galerius, was furious, and said to her: "What can possibly have happened to thee; have the enchantments of the Christians attacked thee?" He ordered her to be imprisoned and tortured. The Queen, it is known, remained steadfast, and died in her new-found faith.[15]

It may be that the conversion of Queen Alexandra gave rise in later years to the legend of St. George rescuing a princess from a dragon, this appellation having been applied to the cruel Galerius.

St. George was again thrown into prison and, at length, when all persuasion and torture had failed, was once again brought before Galerius and the Governors to receive final sentence. One of the Governors, evidently a new-comer to the judicial bench, said to St. George: "First of all inform me from what city thou dost come? And what is it that brought thee here?" In reply St. George stated: "Inasmuch as ye have adjured me by the name of my God I am unable to hide anything from you. I am a Christian and the son of a Christian and no one of my family was ever an idolater. My father was Anastasius, the Governor of Palestine, and son of John, chief Governor of Cappadocia. When the Emperor Diocletian saw the valour of my father Anastasius, he demanded him from his father John, and appointed him Governor of Militene, and the whole country of Palestine. My father, Anastasius, was twenty-five years of age when

[15] Brit. Mus Orient. MS. No. 686 Fol. 177, C. I. See Sir Wallis Budge: *George of Lydda*, p. 23.

he received the office of Governor, and the Emperor gave him a company of three thousand armed soldiers for the maintenance of his authority over the whole country of Palestine. And my father sought out a noble lady whom he might take to wife, Kina Theognosta, the daughter of Dionysius, Count of Lydda, aged eighteen years, and he lived in Palestine until God visited him there. When my mother bore me to him he called my name George, after my father's grandfather. He went to his rest and left me when I was ten years old. One of my sisters was six years old and the other two. Now, behold, I will inform you of the whole matter boldly. I am a Christian and I believe on my Lord Jesus Christ, whatsoever ye desire to do unto me that do."

Then Galerius and the Governors begged him to repent, and proposed to him to worship the gods, and further proposed to raise him to Imperial rank. This account, written by Abba Theodotus, Bishop of Ancyra, continues: "But neither his father's rank as Count, nor the high birth of his mother, nor the glory of his soldierhood could overcome the decision of the truly noble Mar (Lord) George, nor induce him to forsake his piety and perfect faith. God strengthened him on every side like a precious adamant that he might never be moved. And what are the qualities of this brave soldier of Christ, Mar George; his upright and unwavering faith in God; his certain hope; his sincere love; his gentleness to all creatures both great and small; his benignity, his zeal; his patient endurance of the cares of this life; the blamelessness of his soul and his taking his stand boldly at the tribunal; his freedom of speech before the Governors entirely

without fear of man; his patient endurance of torture with great joy of heart, and other sufferings which he bore for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Governors having failed in their efforts to induce St. George to recant said: "Let us pass sentence of death upon him." Then Galerius, the Emperor, sat down and wrote his sentence of death, saying: "I give George, the chief of the Galileans, who hath put the decrees of the Governors behind his back over to the sword and know, O ye peoples, that we are innocent of his blood this day."[16]

Then St. George rejoicing went to the place where he should receive his crown. When he came to the spot the saint asked his guards to wait while he prayed for his persecutors, then turning to them, said: "Come with me, brethren, and fulfil your order and do what ye have to do."[17] St. George was beheaded on April 23rd in the year A.D. 304. In all countries where the memory of St. George is honoured this date, April 23rd, has been observed as St. George's Day right through the centuries.

The name of Galerius in the Coptic Texts is Dadianus, "Great Governor of the Persians". This appellation was given him by the Copts because of his celebrated defeat of Narses, King of Persia, in A.D. 297.

The venerable Bede (A.D. 673-735) in his martyrologie says: "The passion of St. George the Martyr, who under Dacianus [Galerius, a native of Dacia], the most mighty king [or conqueror] of Persia. Lord of no less than seventy tributary princes, was famous

[16] Brit. Mus. Orient MS. 686, Fol. 177, Ch. I.
[17] Ibid.

for his miracles and for converting many to the faith of Christ, in which the Empress Alexandra, wife of Dacianus continued constant even unto death. This George was at last beheaded and received the crown of martyrdom."

One of the most interesting documents in connection with the martyrdom of St. George is to be found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The translation is in the British Museum and was made between A.D. 1755 and 1769.[18] It is a very ancient copy of a Greek manuscript by Pasicrates, the confidential servant of St. George, who accompanied his master to Nicomedia and was a witness of his sufferings and martyrdom. One of the expressed wishes of St. George to his loyal servant was that he should be interred at Lydda; the Coptic texts show how faithfully these wishes were carried out.

Theodosius, Bishop of Jerusalem, gives details of the removal of the martyr's body to Lydda in these words, quoted from the Coptic texts.[19] "After the beheading of Mar George Pasicrates wept and watched by his master's body until sunset. And behold two of his fellow servants came to the city to visit their master and to learn what had become of him, and the people told them saying: 'They have slain him today.' And when they came to the body they found Pasicrates sitting and weeping. On the morrow they went into the city and bought perfumes and spices and linen, and they brought them and put them round the body of Mar George and prepared him for burial according to the custom of the country. They

[18] Sir Wallis Budge: *George of Lydda*, p. 69.
[19] Ibid, p. 114.

found a sepulchre outside the city and laid the body in it: the tomb they then walled up securely and set Pasicrates to keep watch over it.

"Then the two other servants went into the city to labour for their living and to obtain money wherewith to carry the body of their master to Lydda. And it came to pass after they had worked for two months they took the body from the city secretly and they carried it to a merchant ship which had come from Joppa laden with merchandise, and when they had sold the cargo the servants of Mar George spoke with the sailors and they agreed with them for a price to take the body of Mar George on board, and they came to Joppa with speed.

"When the sailors and the merchant heard that it was the body of Mar George of Lydda they marvelled greatly at the manner of the martyrdom, and glorified God, for they were Christians, and they would not take the passage money of the ship from the servants of Mar George; on the contrary they gave them a large gift from their own possessions.

"One of the natives of Joppa, Leontius, an acquaintance of Mar George, brought means for carrying the body and brought it into Mar George's own house at Lydda, and later into the church, where it lay until the shrine (or mausoleum) should be built which the relatives and friends of Mar George determined should be erected for his remains. When the building was completed it was consecrated by Abba Theodosius, Bishop of Jerusalem."

Dr. Clapton states that a rose bush was planted at the tomb of St. George.[20] This gives further confir-

[20] *Life of St. George.*

mation to the tradition that the rose was the badge of the saint's family. The rose of Sharon, the single Persian kind, seems always to have been dedicated to St. George and through him became the emblem of England, an emblem of much more ancient origin than "The Wars of the Roses" and our earliest recognised national link with Palestine.

The last wishes of St. George had been faithfully and loyally fulfilled "and so in his beloved Sharon birthplace, the most verdant spot in all Palestine, the mortal remains of the soldier-martyr were laid in their final resting-place with all reverence and respect. The memory of the noble life lives on, entwined as no other hero's has ever been with our most cherished national traditions. His most appropriate emblem, the Rose of Sharon."[21]

No sooner was the martyrdom of St. George accomplished than the Emperor at whose instigation St. George and thousands of other Christians had been put to death, suffered remorse which led to repentance of his cruel persecutions. "Galerius at length implored pardon of the Christians and confessed his impious opposition to the will of Heaven; he, too, recanted, as the former persecutor (Diocletian) had done, and by laws and ordinances explicitly acknowledged his error in worshipping those whom he had accounted gods, declaring that he now knew, by positive experience, that the God of the Christians was the only true God."[22]

In the April (A.D. 311) before his death Galerius joined with Constantine and Licinius in putting his

[21] E. O. Gordon: *St. George, Champion of Christendom.*
[22] Eus. H.E., Bk. I, Ch. LIX.

signature to an edict of toleration by which the Christians were no longer to be penalised for their religion. He added to it a request that the Christians should pray for him, for themselves and for the safety of the Republic.[23]

Many Christians were released from prison in consequence, for it was in the dominions of Galerius, Emperor of the East, that the persecution had been most severe.

According to Bede St. George suffered under "Dacian, the mighty lord of Persia". As there is no Persian monarch of this name, we may take it that he was referring to Galerius, who was born in Dacia and was the conqueror of the Persian Empire.

Galerius died at Sardica, May, A.D. 311. Constantine immediately restored confiscated land, recalled exiles, and set free political prisoners.[24]

St. George is justly honoured as the "Champion Knight of Christendom", for the noble stand taken by this lord of chivalry and courtesy had the effect he had so ardently desired, and to which he sacrificed all that he held dear and finally his life—to obtain freedom of worship for the Christians.

Within a very few years from his martyrdom Christians were free to worship according to their conscience, and in doing so no longer went in fear of their lives.

The Greek Church from the day of his death has honoured the soldier-saint by the titles "Captain of the Noble Army of Martyrs" and "The Trophy Bearer".

[23] Gibbon: *Decline and Fall,* pp. 132-3.
[24] Hardy: *Christianity and the Roman Government.*

St. George stands for ever before the young manhood of Christendom, one of its great champions, whose courage is revealed in brave intercession for the oppressed. True soldier of Christ, sent forth to combat evil—the martyr soldier. And while St. George, together with a great multitude has received the Crown of those who overcome, the Cross is the symbol of the revered Order which bears his name.

"Gleams the strong palace of the noble martyr George,
Whose honour lofty strews the whole wide world.
Confessing Christ through bars, blood-shed and thirst,
By bonds, by hunger, cold and searing flames,
His head he raised to dwell mid glittering stars.
In valour mighty, tombed in the eastern heavens,
Lo, neath the western skies he offers help.
Therefore, remember, thou who passest by,
To lift thy heart in prayers, and pay thy vows.
Here by its well-deserving's kindly faith
Doth win that which with eagerness it seeks.
*Sidonius, the Master High, all those things
Founded in manner fair and orderly.
Then let the souls who His new temples are
Forward advance along the same straight way."[25]

* Sidonius of Mentz built a church in honour of St. George.

[25] Translation from Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poictiers, Sixth Century.

CHAPTER II

# THE DRAGON

THE dragon incident in the story of St. George, was, in medieval times, a great contribution to the saint's popularity in England, and in Reformation times this reputed incident became the cause of his decline in popularity.

It will be instructive to make a rapid survey of the "dragon" in history.

The dragon in the East and the dragon in the West had, symbolically, entirely different meanings. In the East, the dragon stood for all that was evil and malign; in the West, for a leader in battle. The pendragon of Wales is an outstanding example, and the Welsh as the leading tribe in Celtic times continue to display the dragon flag.

Uthyr Pendragon was the proud title of King Arthur's father, as it had been that of his ancestor Caradoc who so nobly withstood the Roman invader of Britain.

In Biblical times the dragon was synonymous with the Evil one; this idea was continued in the minds of both Christian and non-Christian alike, as a study of early Christianity will reveal.

Moreover, archaeologists have discovered coins and sculpture of a period centuries earlier than the Christian era bearing figures of the dragon very similar to the traditional dragon which St. George is popularly supposed to have slain. The ancients regarded the

dragon—which means "sharp-sighted"—as the enemy of mankind, and its overthrow is made to figure among the greatest exploits of the gods and heroes of heathen mythology. A dragon watches the garden of the Hesperides and its destruction formed one of the seven labours of Hercules.

It was usual to describe a wicked person as a dragon or serpent. The Emperor Galerius, the persecutor of the Christians, was often so described.

"Bas-reliefs and paintings and vignettes in manuscripts frequently represent St. George mounted on a horse, usually a white one, and spearing a hideous dragon. All the legends of the saint's life agree in stating that he was a cavalry soldier and the son of a military Count of the Roman Empire, and it is quite correct to represent him seated on a horse armed with a spear or lance. But some of the legends describe the "dragon" which they say he slew as a beast which was provided with all the attributes of a legendary dragon, big frightful teeth, a cavernous jaw, fiery breath, terrible claws, scaly body, forked tail and wings. The "dragon" over which he prevailed, and which he subsequently slew, was evil-minded and a pagan, viz. King Dadianus (Galerius) who tortured him and who had him decapitated; whence then comes the "dragon"? The texts call Dadianus a "serpent", and a "dragon", and some ancient writers either overlooked the fact that Dadianus was a man, or decided that his treatment of St. George was so infamous that only a picture of the traditional dragon would represent him accurately".[1]

The first written account of St. George's life, that

[1] Sir Wallis Budge: *George of Lydda,* pp. 32-5.

by Pasicrates, the martyr's body-servant, does not contain a dragon incident; but the Emperor (Galerius) is called a dragon which gives a possible departing point for a later allegorical growth. In Syriac versions Dadianus (Galerius) is called the "serpent viper" and again "O foul and evil dragon".

The "Petits Bollandistes" do not give the dragon story, saying it is an allegory.

"The Emperor Constantine caused to be painted on a lofty tablet and set up in the front of the portico of his palace, so as to be visible to all, a representation of the salutary sign, the Cross, placed above his head and below it that hateful and savage adversary of mankind who by means of tyranny of the ungodly, had wasted the Church of God, falling headlong under the form of a dragon to the abyss of destruction. For the sacred oracles in the books of God's prophets have described him as a dragon and a crooked serpent and for this reason the Emperor thus publicly displayed a painted resemblance 'of the dragon' (literally by encaustic painting) beneath his own and his children's feet stricken through with a dart and cast headlong into the depths of the sea. In this manner he intended to represent the secret adversary of the human race, and to indicate that he was consigned to the gulf of perdition by virtue of the salutary trophy placed above his head."[2] Thus wrote an ancient historian. A modern writer states: "Constantine the Great began the development of the Christian allegory of a dragon slain. How soon it was developed we do not know".[3]

[2] Eus. V. Const., Bk. III, C. III.
[3] C. S. Hulst: *St. George*, p. 22.

For many centuries, however, the dragon slain has been associated not so much with Constantine as with his friend and comrade-in-arms George of Lydda. "In later centuries the combat with the dragon came to be one of the most romantic stories of Europe, and St. George as a romantic hero surpassed the great national heroes such as Cid, Orlando, King Arthur, Ogies the Dane and Red Beard. Each nation that touched his story left its mark upon it, and most of the nations touched it."[4]

In ancient history the form of the dragon is described as generally resembling that of a winged and two-legged serpent, the body covered with scales, the head crested, and the mouth spouting fire. The immediate source of the medieval conception is probably the Scriptures, modified by accounts brought home by the Crusaders of the crocodiles in Egypt.

"The cult of St. George was not confined to the 'menne of warre' who carried his banner and invoked his aid in the hour of battle. St. George and his dragon was a familiar sight in the English countryside in pre-Reformation days; the scene was painted on the walls of many a parish Church and sculptured or carved in wood in several Cathedrals; the defender of Christendom trampled on the dragon for the edification of the faithful."[5]

In medieval times ridings and processions were very common such as that represented in a painting in Brussels where St. George in armour rides a charger and the princess leads the dragon with her girdle; but these were gradually stopped after the time of the Reformation.

[4] Ibid, p. 103.
[5] C. J. Marcus: *St. George of England.*

The Rogation Days, preceding Ascension Day, have left their impress upon our local place names. On these three days it was customary for the clergy, church officers and others, to make a round of the parish boundaries, halting at prescribed places for prayers. If the parish boasted an oak the Gospel for the day was read under it, on which account the tree was named a Gospel Oak. In most of the processions an image was carried of the devil in the form of a dragon. When a pause was made for prayer the dragon image was placed out of earshot, which explains why so many parishes have their Dragon's Rock or Dragon's Well, denoting the place where the dragon was left at prayer time, or, in some cases, where the emblem was broken to pieces by the processionists at the close of the third day's rogation.

It would appear that St. George was not depicted seated upon a horse until the time of Edward III who caused him to be "painted upon a lusty courser". Since that time St. George, steed and dragon have invariably been associated.

Edmund Spenser has:

"Y'cladd in mightie armes and silver shielde
As one for knightly guists and fierce encounter fitt."

In England a thirteenth century book of devotions, *Secundum Usam Sarum*, framed the combat with the dragon into an anthem:

"Renowned martyr, George to thee
Adorn'd with Knightly Dignitie
Glory and feast do appertain
For having that fierce Dragon slain.

We thee beseech with heart and soul
That by thy means, we in the Robe,
Of Heaven's blest saints may listed be
With all who serve God faithfully
Being cleansed, so as that no stain
Of sorded sin in us remain
As also that we may profess
And that our lips give thankful praise
To Christ beyond the end of dayes."

From very early times a favourite name for an inn was that of the Patron Saint.

Shakespeare in *King John* has:

"Saint George who swinged the dragon and ere since
Sits on his horse at mine hostess's door."

Both Richmond and Richard invoke the saint:

"Our ancient word of courage, fair St. George
Inspire us with the fiery spleen of dragons."

An old English ballad (1600) which had a wide popularity among all classes of the community indicates their familiarity with other, and in their estimation, lesser heroes of the past:

"Why should we talk of Arthur and his Knights
Knowing how many men have performed fights
Or why should we speak of Sir Lancelot de Lake
Or Sir Tristram de Leon that fought for ladies sake.
Read old stories over and there you will see
How St. George, Saint George, he made the dragon flee.

St. George he was for England, St. Denis was for France.
Sing Honi soit qui mal y pense."[6]

So sang our ancestors in the days when the dragon stood for all that was evil in the nation and in their lives. Thus it has come to pass that for many people "St. George is no more than a name traditionally associated with Dragons".[7]

In all circumstances and in all ages St. George's dragon stood for evil, imaginary or real, marked for destruction. "From the time of the Emperor Constantine to the Crusades St. George symbolised the struggle with paganism. At the time of the Reformation he symbolised the struggle with heresy, and in the future his combat will doubtless, be used to symbolise any struggle between good and evil, the young Sons of Light and the old Dragon of Darkness that rises out of Chaos."[8]

The symbolic meaning attached to the figure of our national saint is thus explained by the Rev. James King in his lecture on St. George: "The dragon is the personification of the Evil Principle, while St. George represents the Good Principle, so that this emblematic device typifies the conflict of good and evil, of light and darkness, and as the valiant knight is triumphing over the dragon, so this National religious device of England foreshadows the ultimate victory of virtue over vice; the complete and final triumph of Christ."

[6] Quoted by Gurney Benham in his book of Quotations.
[7] G. T. Marcus: *St. George of England.*
[8] C. S. Hulst: *St. George,* p. 39.

CHAPTER III

# ST. GEORGE AND THE NESTORIANS

From a Greek manuscript which the late Dr. Clapton (Physician and Lecturer to St. Thomas's Hospital) had in his possession compiled from documents to which Constantine allowed Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea to have access, it would appear that St. George was also known as Nestor—described as a Champion and Defender who valiantly proclaimed the Lord as the true God and soon after met his death. He was also entitled "The Victorious One and Victor" —the identical titles of distinction which the Greek Church has always given to St. George.

The Christian Church had taken root in Persia at a very early date. According to Sempronius and others the Gospel was first preached there by St. Thomas, who afterwards travelled to India where his converts became known as Thomas-Christians, while those in Persia were first known as Syrian or Chaldean Christians and later as Nestorians.[1]

During the reign of the first Sassinadae (of which Artaxerxes was the first of that dynasty) "the early Christian Church extended in all directions, and made many converts in the Persian dominion. This, of course, tended to increase the great intellectual activity of Persia in that period, and added to the problems which Sapor I was forced to consider. The

[1] J. Fleetwood, D.D. *Lives of the Apostles,* p. 417.

introduction of Christianity into the Empire at a time when every effort was being exerted to revive and reform the worship of the fire creed, was a serious question.

Matters were not improved when a third element of discord was introduced by a prophet who set himself up as the founder of a new religion, which, after its founder has been called "Manichaeism".[2] Manee was born in Persia about the year A.D. 240, thirty years earlier than St. George. His object was to incorporate Zoroastrian dualism with Christianity. These were the conditions when St. George (while serving under Galerius in the Persian campaign which lasted for two years and ended in a great victory for the Roman Emperor) first became acquainted with his fellow Christians in Persia.

During his stay there he had ample opportunity to reorganise the Christian community and help them combat the errors of Manichaeism. Coming amongst them as a Christian nobleman, his name Nestor by which he was at that time known became a notable one in the Persian Church, and ended by the community of Christians being called Nestorians.

According to an unvarying tradition St. George founded the true Nestorians "who were originally sons of Israel and not Gentiles" and who have kept the Christian faith in purity down to the present day.

"If it was not this St. George", Dr. Clapton asks, "who founded the true Nestorians, how are we to account for the fact that even up to the present day there are to be found in Urmi, their headquarters, the many churches of St. George, that pilgrimages are

[2] S. G. W. Benjamin: *Persia*, p. 185.

made to these Churches by those in fear and distress of mind?"[3]

By both tradition and fragmentary documentary evidence the "Divine Nestor" of the Christian Church at Urmi is one and the same with the martyred George of Lydda. "The man who had torn up the edict issued by Galerius" (in Nicomedia) was one Nestor, a Christian of high position and a soldier, or as we know him, St. George. These events are related in an ancient panegyric derived from some fragment of Eusebius's lost works. The fact that St. George is here called Nestor is not remarkable since it has long been surmised that St. George was the baptismal name adopted on canonisation and that in his lifetime the saint was known by a different name.[4]

This surmise is strengthened by the traditions of the Assyrian Christians that St. George founded the true Nestorians, whose doctrines have always been very pure, and the organisation of the Christian community at Urmi (Urumiah) they traditionally ascribe to St. George.

As an echo from those far distant days, some years ago two men were taken, footsore and weary, to the Asiatic's Home in London, for whose language there was much difficulty to find an interpreter. At last it was discovered that they were Nestorians, from Persia, and that they had walked nearly all the way from Urumiah, knowing only two English words, one of which was London; their object being to represent to the English people the down-trodden state of their community.

[3] *Life of St. George.*
[4] G. J. Marcus: *St. George of England*, p. 19.

As further evidence of a second name for the same person, Berganza infers from a passage in the Spanish Chronicle of the Cid that they who aspired to knighthood were called only by their baptismal names, and did not assume the patronymic till they had received the Order, in significance that they were not to pride themselves upon hereditary honour till they were able to support it.

St. George, the "Divine Nestor" third century, must not be confused with the monk Nestorius of Antioch of the fifth century, a distinguished orator, who was appointed patriarch of Constantinople. Those who took the side of Nestorius in the Dyoprosopic controversy were called Nestorians.[5]

Among the Persian Nestorians there was an earnest endeavour after scholarship and great scientific activity. They manifested great earnestness in missions and their missionary zeal continued unabated down to the thirteenth century. Their chief mission fields were China and India. The new life infused into the Persian Church by the saintly George of Lydda, or as he was then known Nestor, had far reaching results, extending to the remote East, while his fame as St. George extended to the West.

"Rejoice, Nestor, in thy shining splendour
Rejoice, thou who hast cast down the error of idols,
Rejoice, thou who hast defied the tyrant's wrath."
*Passion of Nestor and Demetrius.*

[5] Kurtz: *Church History,* p. 52-3.

CHAPTER IV

# CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

"Nothing is more binding than the friendship of companions-in-arms"—*Aillard.*

The story of St. George is so intertwined with that of Constantine that no survey of the life and martyrdom of the saint would be complete without a consideration of the active interest taken in the events of his life by this Christian Emperor, and in the many memorials to him set up after his martydom.

Constantine's father, Constantius Chlorus, is recorded as one imbued with the principles of justice and toleration. His mother, Helena, daughter of King Coel of Eastern Britain,[1] (who has come down to us in nursery rhyme as Old King Cole) was a Christian well known for her good works. Helena is recorded in the British Chronicles as "surpassing all the ladies of the country in beauty, as she did others of the time in her skill in music, and the liberal arts. Her father had no other issue to succeed him on the throne; for this reason he was very careful of her education that she might be better qualified to govern the kingdom. Constantine made her his partner and by her had a son, Constantine." . . . "Helena, born at Colchester, the pious wife of Constantius Chlorus and mother of Constantine the Great, who was descended from the blood of the British Kings." Colchester has from time

[1] Geof of Mon. *Hist.*, Ed. J. A. Giles, D.C.L.

immemorial, borne the cross with three crowns for its arms.

"Helena was unquestionably a British princess", states Melancthon[2] and Sozomen writes: "it is well known that the great Constantine received his Christian education in Britain".[3] "Constantine", writes Polydore Vergil, "born in Britain, of a British mother, proclaimed Emperor in Britain beyond doubt, made his natal soil a participator in his glory."[4]

Thus Constantine by his mother's side was the heir and representative of the Royal Christian dynasty in Britain.[5]

This Constantine should not be confused with Constantine the Tyrant, a British prince, who preceded Constantine the Great by about thirty-five years. The name Constantine was fairly common in those days, the confusion arose in this case, however, by both having a son named Constans. Further confusion is caused by the fact that a British princess, Helen, daughter of Eudaf, king of Western Britain, who married Clemens Maximus named one of her three sons Constantine. This Helen was about one hundred years later than the Helena, daughter of King Coel of Eastern Britain who married Constantius Chlorus and whose son was Constantine the Great.

"The Emperor Constantius Chlorus was personally favourable to the Christians, but being only the second personage in the Empire he was obliged to conform to some extent to the Emperor Diocletian's commands.

[2] *Epistola,* p. 189.
[3] Eccles. Hist., Lib. I, Ch. V.
[4] Historia Brit., p. 381.
[5] Morgan: *St. Paul in Britain,* p. 165.

Gaul, in which country Constantius resided for a time, escaped persecution through his intervention."[6]

Constantine himself declared of his father: "The former Emperors I have been accustomed to regard as those with whom I could have no sympathy on account of the savage cruelty of their character. Indeed my father was the only one who uniformly practised the duties of humanity, and with admirable piety called for the blessing of God the Father on all his actions."[7]

Constantine, a Christian through his mother's teaching, was launched, at an early age, on a military career, and while still a boy was sent, practically as hostage, to the Eastern Court. This course was insisted upon by Diocletian when he raised his father, Constantius, to the rank of Emperor of the West.

Constantine accompanied Diocletian to the East in A.D. 295, was invested with the rank of tribunis primi ordinis and served under Galerius on the Danube. Both Constantine and St. George served under Galerius in the Egyptian and Persian campaigns and between the two young Christian soldiers a lasting friendship was formed.

When Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, first saw Constantine as a young man on a journey through Palestine before his accession, he was struck by the sturdy health and vigour of his frame. Eusebius frequently recurs to it and maintains it lasted to the end of his life.[8]

The return of Constantine to Britain in A.D. 305

[6] C. J. Hefele, D.D.: *Hist. of the Christian Councils.*
[7] Eus. V. Con., p. 93.
[8] Eus. V. Con. I., 19-20.

was the direct result of the demand of his father Constantius for the restoration of his son who continued to be held as hostage; some authorities say that Constantine only escaped from the Eastern Court with his life.[9]

Constantine's return to Britain took place immediately after the abdication of Diocletian; his motive in returning was, in fact, to escape from Galerius who had not yet begun to exhibit any of the toleration towards Christians which marked his last years.

In Britain Constantine remained until after the death of his father in the following year. Constantius Chlorus died in his palace at York in A.D. 306.[10]

Constantine received the Imperial authority in Britain itself having been proclaimed Emperor at York, and crowned King of Britain by the "voice of the people" at Silchester in A.D. 306 prior to leaving his native shores to be proclaimed Emperor of Rome.

Britain's "primacy in regard to Christianity" could not possibly have been more clearly demonstrated on the page of history than by this son of the British Helena, founding his Empire and being crowned in Britain and going thence, in July, 306, supported by native British troops to conquer and Christianise the Roman Empire, and "plant the cross of Christ on the throne of the Caesars".

The three primitive things of the Cymry: a primitiveness of hereditary possession; a primitiveness of civil society, and a primitiveness of Christianity.[11]

One of the new Emperor's first acts in his position

[9] *Ency. Brit.* 14th Ed.

[10] Gibbon: *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

[11] Triads. XXI. See Cambro-Briton, Vol. I and II.

of supreme authority was to grant toleration to the Christians of Britain and throughout the Empire. The Edict of Toleration was followed by—in rapid succession—the decree for the observance of Sunday in the towns of the Empire; the use of prayers for the army; abolition of punishment by crucifixion; encouragement of the emancipation of slaves and the prohibition of gladiatorial games. Every one of these steps was a gain to the Roman Empire, and to mankind, and of these benefits none has been altogether lost. Undoubtedly, if Constantine is to be judged by the place which he occupies amongst the benefactors of mankind, he would rank, not among the secondary characters of history but with the very first.[12]

In A.D. 314 Constantine convened the Council of Arles over which he himself presided. Bishops and clergy were summoned from east and west of his vast dominions. This famous Council of the early Christian Church was held mainly for the purpose of settling the difference of opinion as to the treatment of the weak and timid Christians who had denied the Faith in time of persecution and also to consider other causes of dissension in the Church. Some of the Lapsi who had denied Christ and sacrificed to idols were afterwards seized with deep penitence and some even had suffered martyrdom. The command to deliver up the Scriptures had given rise to another order of apostates; these had had recourse to a subterfuge by surrendering heretical writings instead of the sacred books; the earnest spirit of the age treated them as no better than traitors.[13]

[12] Dean Stanley: *Hist. of Eastern Church*, p. 195.
[13] Mason: *The Persecution of Diocletian.*

According to the Greek Church it was at this Council of Arles that Constantine proposed that his former companion-in-arms, the martyred George of Lydda, should be chosen as the model and example of the young manhood of Christendom, and was henceforth termed the "Champion Knight of Christendom".

The names of the British signatories at this Council are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Eborius | Bishop of York, |
| Restitutus | Bishop of London, |
| Adelphus | Bishop of Caerleon-on-Usk.[14] |

Ancient Britain thus set her seal to the adoption of George of Lydda as the Champion Knight of Christendom, to be in later years adopted as her own particular Patron Saint.

Dean Stanley writes of Constantine as "a pillar of the Eastern Church", and continues, "Nor is his life without a special connection with the history of our own Church. To English students I cannot forbear recalling that he was, if not our fellow countryman by birth, yet unquestionably proclaimed Emperor in the Praetorium at York. . . . The remembrance of that early connection long continued. It shaped itself into the legend of his British birth, of which within the walls of York the scene is still shown. His father's tomb was pointed out in York until the suppression of the monasteries. His mother's name, Helena, lives still in the numerous British Churches dedicated to her. London wall was ascribed to Constantine. One argument pleaded by the English ecclesiastics for prece-

[14] Mansi. *Concilia* Vol. II, pp. 476-477.

dence in the Councils of Constance and Basle was that Constantine had been a born Englishman. He was not only the first Christian Emperor but the first example of the intervention by a sovereign power in the internal affairs of the Church."[15]

After the Council of Arles the Bishops became a regular Court party with free access to Constantine's presence. There was usually a group of Churchmen at Court whom he consulted;[16] and further, the Edict of Milan changed the Christian Church from an organisation barely tolerated by the State to a legally authorised corporation recognised as holding corporate property, and the clergy were by Constantine exempt from paying tax.[17]

It is recorded that the years during which Constantine was giving his direct personal attention to the government of Britain and Gaul were years of prosperity for them. The same may be said for every part of his vast Empire; it was entirely due to the influence of this active Christian organiser that religion began "to shine gloriously".

In this connection it should be remembered that no Christian's life was free from the fear of torture and death during the first three centuries of the Christian era. This first protector of the Church, Constantine, caused the sacred symbol, a figure of the cross, to be emblazoned upon the Labarum,[18] which henceforth became the Imperial Standard of the Roman Power. It was committed to a guard of fifty men whom it was believed to shield from danger in battle. It raised the

[15] Dean Stanley: *Hist. of Eastern Church,* pp. 186-8.
[16] Eus. V. Con. C.I. 35.
[17] Gibbon (Bury) II., p. 567.
[18] Riddles Lat. Dic.

enthusiasm of the Christian soldiers who had followed Constantine from Britain, Spain and Gaul. It rallied the oppressed Christians everywhere to his side and for many centuries in the East the Red Cross was used as the symbol of Christian against Pagan, and later came to be regarded in the West as the personal sign of St. George.

Schaff states that the victory of Constantine over Maxentius and Licinius was a military and political victory of Christianity over heathenism. Within ten years of the accession of Constantine the Christian became the prevailing, the established religion of the Roman Empire, and with it came into prominence the Red Cross.

The symbol of the Cross was in use in pre-Constantine days though for fear of the reproaches of Jews and heathen not yet in its proper form but only in a form that indicated what was meant, namely, in the form of a Greek T.[19] From the suppression of persecution by Constantine the symbol of the Cross was used openly and fearlessly. The Christian spirit pervaded the domestic and civil life and thus was developed a code of Christian morals which expressed itself in the family devotions and family communions and in putting the sign of the Cross upon all callings in life. The sign of the Cross was made during every ecclesiastical action, and even in private life was frequently used, and so in the East the Red Cross became established as the symbol of the Christian.

In the West the symbol came to be known as "The Cross of St. George". England is the only country that has adopted the Red Cross of St. George as its

[19] Zockler: *The Cross of Christ.*

National ensign. The reason for this may perhaps be found in Hardynges fifteenth century "Chronicle" where a still earlier origin is claimed for our Red Cross device connecting it with Joseph of Arimathea.

"Joseph converted this King Arviragus
By his prechying to know ye laws divine
And baptised him as write hath Nennius
The Chronicler in Britain tongue full fyne,
And to Christ's laws made him enclyne
And gave him then a shield of sylver white
A cross and long end overthwarte full perfect
Those arms were used through all Britain
For a common syne, eche man to know his nacion
And these armes by Joseph's creacion
Full long afore Saint George was generate
Were worshept here of mykell elder date."

It is said that Constantine, instead of rewarding his soldiers for valour with a plain gold collar, such as was customary, rewarded them with a gold collar of Greek characters from which was suspended a cross like that which supernaturally appeared to him and attached thereto the image of St. George.

It is not therefore surprising that the cult of St. George became so rapidly widespread, gaining much in popularity from the connection of St. George with the Cross displayed in this spectacular fashion. Nor could Constantine have chosen a more effective form by which to establish the memory of his late comrade-in-arms, the soldier martyr, in the minds of those to whom he desired the Champion-Knight of Christendom should be an example in Christian grace and whose courage he wished them to emulate.

On a Greek MS. in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the Coptic Cross appears in yellow, red and green. On each side the foot of the Cross is a peacock. To the early Christians the peacock was emblematic of a glorious body. This bird was adopted as a type of the resurrection on account of the annual renewal of its beautiful plumage.[20]

Some historians have said that in 1066 William of Normandy, called the Conqueror, flew the standard of the Red Cross of St. George from the masthead as he approached the British Isles and under it fought the Battle of Hastings, making it by his victory the national flag of England.[21]

The Bayeaux tapestry[22] shows a banner with a Red Cross of equal arms received by William from Bishop Odo and carried by a standard bearer when a camp was entrenched at Hastings. The field of this banner is a pale-bluish colour and the Cross in red.

The earliest appearance of the crucifix, as distinct from the cross, is fixed by M. Raoul-Rochette at the close of the seventh century, almost contemporary with the Council of Constantinople.

Constantine not only enjoined on all the subjects of the Roman Empire to observe the Sabbath Day as a day of rest but also to honour the day which preceded the Sabbath. In this he was conforming to the custom of the Church in keeping the Jewish Sabbath as a day of cessation from work, and in addition the Christian Sabbath as a day for worship. Thirty years after the death of Constantine the Council of Laodi-

[20] Kurtz: *Church History*, 34-4.
[21] Seymour: *The Cross in Tradition and History.*
[22] Facsimile of Bayeaux tapestry in Chapter House, Westminster Abbey.

cea removed all scruples as to the duty of Christians to keep the Jewish Sabbath. Custom, however, prevailed for centuries and in the British Church both days were observed as late as the time of St. Columba.

Constantine rebuilt churches that had been destroyed during the Diocletian persecution and gave liberally to charities. "By the Edict of Toleration the Christian churches were to become legally collegia; guilds; corporate bodies with rights and liabilities defined by law. The Christians, however, were remarkably slow to respond with enthusiasm. The Church refused to be a collection of colleges; it planted its standard for freedom of organisation and universality of membership."[23]

The panegyric on Constantine by Bishop Theodotus contains the following eulogium: "He was a lover of God, a lover of charity; a lover of man, a lover of goodness and of every person. He went to Church morning and evening every day; he made large assemblies at the Holy Communion; he prayed to God with great earnestness; he gave away large charities and gifts; and he and his house and his mother, the God-loving Queen Helena feared the Lord always, and they praised and blessed and thanked our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory and honour now and for ever."

Eusebius tells us that Constantine made a practice of systematic benevolence to the neglected poor as well as those who had fallen into poverty from good stations in life—to widows and orphan girls in particular whom he provided with dowries.

The tabernacle, a tent made in the shape of a

[23] Hardy: *Christianity and the Roman Government.*

church which Constantine always carried with him in his military expeditions is described by Sozomen.[24]

Upon the site of the place of execution where St. George was beheaded, Constantine and his mother, Queen Helena, erected a Church which at the present time is used for Mohammedan worship and known as the Mosque of St. George.

Upon the site of the shrine erected over the remains of St. George at Lydda Constantine built his magnificent Byzantine Church. Constantine is known to have dedicated twenty-one churches to the honour of St. George. That at Lydda is referred to in the Greek Menologie in the following words: "Not long after the death of St. George, religion then beginning to shine gloriously and Constantine, the pious Emperor then reigning, such as was devoted both to the Gospel of Christ and the Martyr, built at Lydda a beautiful and magnificent temple to his honour, translating thither the blessed corpse out of the obscure corner where it had been buried. A temple of so high esteem that the Feast of the Dedication of it was kept holy, and so continued to succeeding generations."

The first Church in Jerusalem dedicated to St. George is said to have been erected by the Empress Helena near to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the time of her sojourn in Jerusalem in A.D. 326. In the opinion of the archaeologist, Dr. Conrad Shick this tradition is based on truth.

In the calendar of the Eastern Church the Empress Helena and her son are always united. Churches were erected at Helena's instigation and Constantine's cost.

In Britain a Church was erected by Constantine to

[24] Lib. I, Ch. VIII. See English translation.

the memory of St. Amphibulus, one of the victims of the Diocletian persecution when 10,000 Christians at Caerleon-on-Usk alone perished with their teachers. The memory of the Emperor Constantine as the founder of the Church of St. Amphibulus at Winchester was preserved until Commonwealth times by his sword "laid up" in the great Reliquary of the Cathedral. This is the first recorded instance of a sword "laid up" in a sacred building. A later instance is the sword by Edward I at Westminster Abbey and that by Edward III the founder of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, whose sword at the present moment is "laid up" in the old Chapter House, now used as a vestry.[25] Under this ancient religious custom the sword presented by King George VI to Stalingrad in 1943 was "laid up" in Westminster Abbey before transfer to its final destination.

"Burchardt when travelling in Syria found two early Churches, one in Ezra and one in Shaka each of which had old Greek dedications inscribed to St. George."[26] In the "Transactions of the Royal Literary Society" Mr. Hogg shows that both are very early dedications, and one must have been made in the year 346—that is within fifty years of St. George's death—during the lifetime of George the Arian who died in A.D. 362. This becomes very important testimony when we turn to the famous charge, made against St. George by Dr. Reynolds of Norwich, and later again by the historian Gibbon.

In the "Chronicle" of Hesychius Milesius written in the year A.D. 518 we read that Constantine the

[25] H. W. Blackburne: *St. George's Chapel.*
[26] M. H. Bulley: *St. George for Merrie England.*

Great dedicated a Church in Constantinople to George the Martyr about the year A.D. 330—during the lifetime of the Arian George.

"Persons of moderate substance who could not afford to build a church could at least provide the paving for an aisle and the nature of the material enabled them to include a written record of their benefactions. Of these mosaic pavements an immense number have survived. At Madala the mosaic floor decorations include a topographic border with pictures of churches separated by trees. The churches have their names written above them; less than half the number on the complete border have survived—and among them Georgiopolis (Lydda)."[27] Herein is important testimony not only to the connection of St. George with Lydda but to the fact that his fame as nobleman and martyr allowed of his native city being known by his name.

In Rome the church of San Georgia in Valabro is thought by some to date back to Constantine's time, and to be the old church of St. George referred to in a letter of Pope Gregory, A.D. 601, as in a state of decay and in need of repair.[28]

The beautiful Christian Churches were, in early times, an inspiration to the Moslems. In a tenth century account of the building of the great Mosque at Damascus, Muqudda wrote: "Al-Walid had seen Syria, this country of the Christians, and had there seen some of their beautiful churches whose adornments were a temptation and whose fame was widespread, as, for example, the churches of Ludd (Lydda)

[27] J. W. Crowfoot: *Early Church in Palestine,* p. 145
[28] F. F. de San Pietro Agnostinians Saalzo.

and Edessa; he therefore undertook to construct for the Moslems a mosque which would attract them away from these Churches, and he made it one of the wonders of the world."[29]

Constantinople, rebuilt by Constantine in A.D. 330 on the site of the ancient Byzantium, was the first purely Christian city ever built; no pagan temple was open for public worship within its bounds.[30] This "City of Constantine" was made by its builder the capital of the Roman Empire.

Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, the first example of the intervention of a sovereign power in the internal affairs of the Church stood in peculiar relations both to the Eastern and Western Churches. He retained the office of Pontifex Maximus among his Imperial powers in order to possess a legal right to supervise religious questions.[31] Never did he swerve from the policy proclaimed by him in one of his early edicts: "We call God to witness, the Saviour of all men, that in assuming the government we are influenced solely by these two considerations—the uniting of the empire in one faith and the restoration of peace to a world rent to pieces by the insanity of religious persecution." The extent to which Constantine succeeded in this worthy aim has been the theme of Church and secular historians over many centuries, and to the people of Britain, the leading Christian nation, it should be matter of importance, that this first Christian Emperor was British born.[32]

Constantine married Fausta, daughter of Maximus

[29] M. E. Berchen: *Early Moslem Architecture,* p. 148
[30] Dean Stanley: *Hist. of the Eastern Church,* p. 188.
[31] Ibid
[32] Eumenius (Arntzein), p. 373 et. seq.

Herculius. Fausta cannot have been other than a Christian in view of Constantine's own beliefs and his powerful defence of Christianity; also in view of his reference to Eutropia, Fausta's mother: "One benefit and that of no ordinary importance has been conferred upon us by my truly pious mother-in-law."[33]

Constantine, like some even of the noblest characters in the Christian Church regarded baptism as a complete obliteration and expiation of all former sins, and therefore deferred the ceremony until near the end of his life. Even a century later than his time such men as Ambrose and Augustine of Hippo were still unbaptised, the one in his thirty-fourth, the other in his thirty-second year. We may be sure that the practice was sufficiently common in the far more unsettled age of Constantine to awake no scruple in him, and to provoke no censure from his ecclesiastical advisers.

"Constantine was baptised in the Lateran Palace by Sylvester, Bishop of Rome. He gave him the palace which had witnessed the baptism. He gave him the dominion over the city of Rome, over Italy, over the Western Empire.

" 'Ah Constantine to how much ill gave birth
Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower.'

"So Dante wrote in the bitterness of his heart of what he believed to be the origin of the Pope's temporal sovereignty.[34] This would appear to be the historical reason that the Palace and Church of the Lateran rather than St. Peter's and the Vatican, form the nucleus of Christian and Papal Rome. Here and

[33] Eus. V. Con., p. 158.
[34] *Inferno*, XIX, 115. Milton, Prose Works, p. 11.

not in St. Peter's have all the Roman Councils been held. This and not St. Peter's is the Cathedral Church of Rome. Here and not the Vatican was the early residence, and still takes place the enthronisation and coronation of the Popes. On the throne of the Lateran and not on the chair of St. Peter's is written the inscription:

" 'This is that gift if you the truth will have
Which Constantine to good Sylvester gave.' "[35]

That Constantine only accepted baptism shortly before his death is well attested by many historical writers; the place of baptism came into the realm of controversy at the end of the fifth century. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea states that Constantine was baptised by Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. The supporters of the Roman claim state that a baptistry was discovered in Rome which bore the name of Constantine.[36] If, however, the place of baptism is disputed the fact of his baptism has never been questioned.

Constantine became ill at Helenopolis and afterwards proceeded to Nicomedia where he died on Whit-Monday, May 25th, A.D. 335. His body was removed from Nicomedia to Constantinople; there, and not in Rome, which city, it is said, he visited but twice during his reign, the remains of Constantine the Great were solemnly interred in a Church which he had himself erected as a Mausoleum and called "The Church of the Apostles". A sarcophagus called "of Constantine" still remains in the Museum of the Seraglio.

[35] Dean Stanley: *History of the Eastern Church.*
[36] Kurtz: *Church History.* 42-1.

CHAPTER V

# KING ARTHUR

After Constantine the Great it is to the British king, Arthur, that we owe the preservation of the memory of St. George, whose charming qualities of mind and heart appealed with irresistible force to a prince no less Christian.

Descended through the same royal line as Queen Helena from Caractacus, King of the Silures (some authorities say he was a descendant of Constantius and Helena)[1] the historicity of Arthur's reign is well established.

In the Middle Ages doubt was thrown upon Arthur's existence; this, however, at a time when it had become fashionable to view with scepticism the tales and romances of former days. St. George came in for the same summary treatment by medieval scholars.

The historical writer Gibbon states: "The Romance of Arthur transcribed in the Latin of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and afterwards translated into the fashionable idiom of the times, was enriched with the various though incoherent ornaments which were familiar to the experience, the learning, or the fancy of the twelfth century."

"Every nation embraced and adorned the popular romance of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. At length the light of science and reason was

[1] Sir Thomas Malory: *Hist. of King Arthur,* p. 109.

re-kindled; the talisman was broken; the visionary fabric melted into air; and by a natural though unjust reversal of public opinion the severity of the present age is inclined to question the existence of Arthur."[2] Skene, the Welsh writer says: "I do not hesitate to receive the Arthur of Nennius as the historic Arthur, the events recorded of him being not only consistent with the period but connected with localities that can be identified and with most of which his name is still associated.[3]

The twelfth-century chronicler Giraldus Cambrensis, declared that he saw the tomb of Arthur opened at Glastonbury by order of Henry II; that he saw the hero's bones and his famous sword Excalibur and read the inscription on the tombstone that this verily was King Arthur's grave; and in the sixteenth century two celebrated antiquarians and historians, John Cleland and William Camden vouched that the tomb and inscription were still there and had been seen by them.[4]

Knyghton and Bromton both gave an account of the discovery of the tomb of King Arthur in the reign of Henry II, one of whom stated that he had positively seen and touched it. Richard I (when on Crusade) presented to the king of Sicily King Arthur's famous sword Excalibur.[5]

The quaint Fuller, writing in 1634, says: "The best evidence that once Arthur lived in Britain is because it is certain he died in Britain, as appears undeniably by his corpse, coffin and epitaph taken out of his

[2] *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* Ch. XXXVIII.
[3] *Four Ancient Books of Wales.* Vol. I, p. 51.
[4] C. R. Cammell: "King Arthur" in *Everybody's.*
[5] C. P. B. James: *Richard Coeur-de-Lion.* Vol. II, p. 250.

monument in Glastonbury in the reign of Henry II whereof many persons of quality were eyewitnesses."

Many of the early British kings and queens were buried at Glastonbury (hallowed by its associations with early Christianity), King Coel, father of Queen Helena amongst them. But by far the most illustrious of the mighty dead was Britain's renowned warrior, King Arthur.

Besides holding his kingly office, Arthur was a Guledig, or war-chieftain and as such is commemorated in the Welsh triads and bardic records. "The Welsh scholars assign these bardic effusions to the sixth century. Some are probably of later date, but if we may accept what is now generally believed, we must attribute some of these poetic remnants to a time when Arthur was a recent memory, and give credence to them as at least founded on fact."[6]

Also founded on fact is *Morte D'Arthur,* it is no flight of Sir Thomas Malory's fancy. For Margaret of Richmond, the most learned lady of the day, and the patroness of learning at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, had specially employed the old Welsh knight, at her own cost, to collect, sift and garner material from Welsh MSS. then extant, traditions and the legends in Wales and Cornwall, and historical data wherever he could find it concerning the British King Arthur, "the first of the most Christian worthies of the world" (see Caxton's preface to the *Morte D'Arthur,* "from whom her son Henry Tudor, the heir-presumptive to the throne, was lineally descended".[7]

[6] Dr. Dickenson: *King Arthur,* p. 15.
[7] E. O. Gordon: *Pre-historic London,* p. 158.

Sir Thomas Malory entitled his work the "noble and joyous history of the Grete conqueror and excellent Kynge Arthur, some time Kynge of this royalme, then called Bretagne"—a work pronounced by Sir Walter Scott to be "the best prose romance the English language can boast of".[8]

Nennius, the eighth century historian, tells of Arthur and his exploits; it is the earliest extant work in which the name of Arthur is recorded.[9]

According to William of Malmesbury Arthur "upheld the sinking state and raised the broken spirit of his country-men to war . . . he was a man worthy to be celebrated not by idle fiction but by authentic history",[10] and Henry of Huntingdon calls him "the mighty warrior general of the armies, and chief of the kings of Britain.[11]

So much of legend and absurd fable has grown around the historic Arthur, that, in modern days, the question has been asked "Who is this regal personage that stalks athwart the path of history as a shadowy apparition clothed in the mists of legend?"

It is said that the boy-king Arthur possessed in a remarkable degree a magnetic personality, and succeeded where his uncle Aurelius, and his father Uthyr Pendragon had failed, in winning the allegiance of the petty princes of the realm.

In the "Ancient Chronicles of the Kings of Britain", Arthur's pedigree, appearance, character and actions are thus described: "Arthur ap Uthyr Pendragon

[8] Printed by W. Copeland in 1556.
[9] *Historia Britonum.*
[10] *History of the Kings,* p. 11.
[11] *History of England.*

was made King of all Brittain when he was but young of fifteen years of age, but he was faire and boulde and doughtie of bodie and to meek folk he was good and courteous and tardy of spending and made him wondrously well-beloved among all men."[12]

Windsor Castle "built and founded by King Arthur"[13] on the historic table-mound where afterwards Edward III built his Round Tower. Here, Chaucer tells us "Arthur built his Castle", and according to a tradition mentioned by Froissart was the exact spot upon which Arthur held his Court and assembled his Knights.

Of the many titles to fame which Arthur might claim that which interests us most in the present quest is his institution of "The Order or Society of St. George and the Round Table" which the young king made his instrument for the defence of the realm against "Rome and the heathen" and for purifying the world. His knights were bound by the strictest vows of truth, purity, loyalty and self-devotion.

"To reverence the King as if he were
Their Conscience, and their conscience as their King;
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ;
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs
To speak no slander, no nor listen to it;
To honour his own word as if his God's
To lead sweet lives of purest chastity."

It was about two hundred years after the martyrdom of the soldier-saint when our British king, Arthur,

[12] P. 49.
[13] Froissart.

set about the founding of his Order of Chivalry to which he gave the name "The Round Table". He adopted St. George, the "Champion Knight of Christendom" as the Patron and Protector of his goodly fellowship. From this time the example of the "Victorious One" became the high ideal of every British knight. St. George's fearless intercession with Diocletian made him specially popular in liberty-loving Britain.

The Round Table Assembly was kept at several places, especially at Caerleon in Monmouthshire, at Winchester, Windsor and at Camelot in Somerset. The chief place of meeting was at Winchester, where King Arthur caused a great round table to be made, at which the knights at Whitsuntide did sit. Whitsuntide, the Feast of Pentecost, is for ever associated with Arthur, for it was then in his Court at Camelot that "marvels were shown to him".[14]

The knights sat at their Round Table and every knight while he did eat had at his back a squire with his armour in waiting. No seat was thought to be of more dignity that the rest, yet one seat was called the seat perilous (peerless) reserved for that knight who did excel the rest in virtue. That place by consent of all the knights was allotted to King Arthur, who for his valour surpassed all other knights and professors of arms. According to Malory King Arthur but re-modelled the Round Table on Christian lines, it being originally constructed by Merlin for Uthyr Pendragon, who presented it to Leodogran, but that on Arthur's marriage with Leodogran's daughter, the Table and a hundred knights with it were sent to

[14] E. O. Gordon: *St. George, Champion of Christendom.*

Arthur and Guinevere as a wedding gift that should please him more than a great deal of land.

Arthur's vision of a Round Table of Fellowship, embodying the spirit of humility, patience, chivalry and service was truly noble. It was a step forward in practical Christianity, an object lesson to the nation which has never been forgotten. From the Table the knights went into the world to redress wrongs or assist others—it was the centre of their service to man.

The oldest and most authentic copy of the Rules of the Round Table is in a fifteenth century MS. in the Harleian collection, British Museum.

The following are the "Oathes of the Knights of the Tablê Round in the time of the Noble King Arthur":

(1) Not to put off your armour from your bodies but for requisite rest in the night.

(2) To search for marvellous adventures whereby to attain bruit and renown.

(3) To defend to your power and might the poor and simple people in their right.

(4) Not to refuse aid to them which shall ask a just quarrel.

(5) Not to hurt, offend or play any lewd part the one to the other.

(6) To fight for the protection, defence and welfare of Britain.

(7) Not to perseugh any or particular profit, but honour and your title to honesty.

(8) Not to break your promise or service for any reason or occasion whatsoever.

(9) To prove your life to maintain the honour of the country.

(10) Sooner choose to dye honestly than to fly shamefully.

That there was an earlier Round Table Fellowship, as mentioned by Malory, is revealed by a study of the "Legends of the Holy Grail". The Legends have as a starting point the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain accompanied by a little band of early converts to the Christian Faith. These were the "Quidam advanae" the "certain strangers" or Culdees of the early British Church.[15]

"Some recent writers, among them Miss L. Weston who speaks with authority, have given it as their opinion that the legend of the Holy Grail, although of British origin, has certainly been sophisticated by Oriental or alien ideas . . . in its early form it is demonstrably of British origin."[16]

The Oriental influence is well explained by Mr. J. W. Taylor; he clarifies much of the "mystery" which surrounds the simple story. He says: "All the extensive literature of the Grail quest, which dates from 1200 onwards, is grouped around the tradition of St. Joseph of Arimathea and his companions bringing the Holy Cup of the Last Supper with them to Glastonbury, and it is full of the idea that these were the ancestors of those great knights who formed the flower of Arthur's court.

"In the 'Grand St. Grail' one of the earliest of these histories, we are told that after the death of St.

[15] See *Celt, Druid and Culdee*, p. 87.

[16] Lewis Spence: *Mysteries of Britain*, p. 157.

Joseph and his son Josephes, the keeping of the Holy Grail was confided to Alain, the son of Brons, and cousin of Josephes. At Alain's death his brother Josue became Grail keeper, and after him six kings, the last of whom was Pelles.

"The daughter of King Pelles had a son named Galahad, who becomes the special hero of the Holy Grail. His father is said to have been Lancelot and this makes him ninth or tenth from the time of St. Joseph.

"Galahad is one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table, and it is worthy of note that the ten generations described as intervening between the times of St. Joseph (A.D. 60-90) and King Arthur (A.D. 500) are seriously consistent with such measure of history as may well underlie the romance.

"In the most readily accessible books of the 'San Grail' (apart from the *Morte D'Arthur*) 'The High History of the Holy Grail' which was probably compiled about A.D. 1220 from the book of Josephes in the Abbey Library at Glastonbury, and has been translated by Dr. Sebastian Evans, it is impossible not to recognise the important and essential part played by this Hebrew lineage or descent. Every book bears witness to this, and the very names of many of the knights or their associates seem to imply their Jewish (Israel) origin. Eli-nant of Escavalon, Joseph, Josephes, Lot, Joseus, Josiuos, Petrus, Brons or Hebron, Bruns Brandalis, Urien, Jonas, Pelles and Pelleas and Ban may be taken either as examples of Hebrew names or as indicating some special Hebrew association."[17] However apocryphal many of the

[17] See Apocrypha: I Esdras V, 12-37; IX, 12-34.

legends may be regarding them, their names are, I believe, the names of historical persons, and the stories of their lives are in rough harmony with that imperfect militant Christianity which was, not only the ideal of the medieval compilers, but may well have been the actual achievements of these distant descendants of the Judean Maccabees.

"In the *Morte D'Arthur* which contains almost entire the 'Quest of the San Grail' we find curious and startling digressions regarding King David, King Solomon, and Judas Maccabeus. These are mixed with the legends of the Arthurian Knights, and no direct explanation is offered or has been offered for their presence. But if, as many of the old writers affirm, King Pelles, Sir Percival, Lancelot and Galahad might be considered as descendants of these Hebrew kings, their chief ancestors being Joseph of Arimathea and the Brons or Hebron who married the sister of Joseph, not only do these interpolations become less unintelligible, but the fusion of cultivated Hebrew with Celtic stock may to some extent account for that wonderful achievement in moral ideal and Christian chivalry which characterises the story of King Arthur's Court and the quest of the Holy Grail.

"Mr. Alfred Nutt who has made a special study of the Grail legends, considers them to be essentially British in origin, and suggests that they were carried from Britain to France at the time of the Celtic immigration into Brittany, between the fourth and sixth centuries. He professes to trace their beginnings from pre-Christian times in Britain, but recognises that the Joseph of Arimathea history is undoubtedly one of the conversion of Britain. . . . He appears to ac-

knowledge an historic King Arthur, but attempts nowhere to explain that insistence on Hebrew lineage and wonderful atmosphere which may be regarded as among the distinguishing features of the legends of the Holy Grail. In the 'High History' this Hebrew relationship is repeatedly mentioned. Sir Perceval; his mother Y'Glais, his sister Dindrane; Sir Lancelot, the hermit Knight; Joseus; King Pelles, the Fisher King; and the King of the Castle Mortal, are all represented as being directly of the lineage of Joseph, and in one or two passages this appears to include King Arthur also. In the grand St. Grail we read that Gawain was the son of Lot of Orcaine (Orkney) and that King Lot was descended from Petrus. If so (as Gawain was the nephew of King Arthur) the King himself and nearly all his Table Round are represented as having Hebrew relationship and being for the most part of Hebrew lineage.

"If the medieval writers had not found the historical ground work of their writings already recorded for them they would never have dreamed of Hebrew characters as types of British knighthood; there was not so much love for the Jew in medieval times that his people, or the descendants of Briton and Jew should be exalted as the greatest heroes of contemporary fiction. The medieval romancers only invented new and prolonged adventures for recognised heroes whose reputed lineage and even names they did not dare to alter. There is, after all, but little reason to disbelieve the tale we are told by the compiler of the 'High History' viz. that the Latin original, written by a scribe named Josephus, was in the Abbey Library of the Isle of Avalon (or Glastonbury) where the

bodies of King Arthur and Guinevere were buried, and that relationship of the chief actors and the main outlines, of their adventures were regarded as historical and worthy of belief."[18]

It is not a little remarkable that in the Legends of the "Holy Grail", Brons or Hebron sailing from Palestine, is said to have floated across on a garment taken from Joseph's son. That there is some historical truth hidden in this legend we cannot doubt. Mr. Alfred Nutt believed that Pelles, the name of the Fisher King had a significance now lost. In view of the age-long custom of the Israelites to take the name of territory with which they had some connection it is a striking fact that it was from Pella the Christian Israelites had their last view of the Holy Land from the East, that is from Trans-Jordania. Somewhere on the slopes of Gilead, near the scene of Jacob's first view of the land of his descendants and of the capital of the exiled David, was Pella, so called by the Macedon Greeks from its springing fountain. This was the city well known in Christian history as the refuge of the little band which here took shelter when the armies of Titus (A.D. 70) gathered round Jerusalem. From Pella these refugees caught their last glimpse of the hills of Palestine; it was the "last sigh" of the Hebrew exile.[19] They had obeyed the Divine injunction to "flee to the mountains".[20] The probability is that the name of Pelles, the Fisher King, had its derivation in this Pella of Gilead.

The main source whence the legend writers drew

[18] J. W. Taylor: *The Coming of the Saints,* pp. 211-16.
[19] Dean Stanley: *Sinai and Palestine,* pp. 330-1.
[20] Luke XXI, 20-1.

their knowledge of Joseph of Arimathea was the Evangelium Nicodemi. In England it was known as far back as the latter quarter of the eighth century. "Whence this knowledge and popularity of this apocryphal gospel in England centuries before it entered prominently into the literature of any other European people?"[21]

The Holy Grail in some of the romances is described as a cauldron, again as a dish or cup. The vessel which King Arthur and his companions recover is described in the Taliesen poem as a cauldron, the rim of which is set with pearls.

In view of the Hebrew influences discovered in the romances it is interesting to note that the Jewish rabbis were fond of comparing God's Law with a ring set with pearls. The ring was thus the whole of the Law and the pearls the separate commandments. The text (Matt. vii, 6) *could* be read "Give not the ring to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine".

In the time of King Arthur the meaning of the symbolism underlying "The Holy Grail" and everything connected with it was not yet lost, and much that is "mystery" in modern times was by our ancestors clearly understood.

We are, however, aware that the Cup used at the Last Supper was the original of the legends of the "Holy Grail", fantastic though these legends had become by the Middle Ages, but the Hebrew connection and atmosphere never entirely disappeared and, undoubtedly, kept alive that reverential attitude to the Sacred Cup which was so strong a feature of early British Christianity.

[21] Alfred Nutt: *Studies in the Legends of the Holy Grail.*

In the "High History of the Holy Grail" Alain le Gros "had eleven brethren, right good Knights like as he was himself. And none of them all lived in his Knighthood but twelve years, and they all died in arms, for their great hardiment in setting forward of the Law that was made new."

There were twelve brethren:

"Alain le Gros was the eldest (or first).
Gorgalians was next.
Brans Brandalis was the third.
Bertholez le Chanz the fourth.
Brandalis of Wales was the fifth.
Elinant of Exavalon was the sixth.
Calobrutus was the seventh.
Meralis of the Palace Meadow was the eighth.
Fortunes of the Red Launde was the ninth.
Melaarmaus of Abanie was the tenth.
Galians of the White Tower was the eleventh.
Alibans of the Waste City was the twelfth."

"All these died in arms in the service of the Holy Prophet that had renewed the Law by His death and smote His enemies to the utmost of their power. Of these two manner of folk, whose names and records you have heard, Josephus the good clerk telleth us, was come the good Knight Sir Perceval, he was of the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea."[22]

No stretch of imagination is required to see that these twelve knights, brethren in arms and religious belief, were martyrs, and in the order set forth in the ancient records. All, or most of them fell, most pro-

[22] *High History of the Holy Grail.*

bably, in the Diocletian persecution and the variety of their names indicates that all were not of British origin. The second on the list, Georgalians, would appear to be none other than St. George, one of the best known victims of the persecution. Nor need it cause surprise that a Palestinian was included in this list for in view of the Hebrew origin of many of the knights, George of Lydda, descended from "the saints that dwelt at Lydda" who were sons of Israel and not Gentiles, would quite naturally be given a place among the twelve pattern knights who "all died in arms for their great hardiment in setting forward of the Law which was made new".

As further evidence of St. George's Israel origin it may be noted that Galerius in condemning the saint to death, addressed him as "Chief of the Galileans".

Numerous Eastern writers speak with an intimate note concerning the constant connection between the churches in Palestine and remote Britain.[23] It is not, therefore, surprising to learn that Eastern usages continued in the British Church for centuries.[24]

The tenth on the list, Melaarmaus of Abanie is quite evidently Melior, Bishop of Carlisle, a native of Southern Scotland. While the twelfth, Alibans of the Waste City, is clearly St. Alban of Verulam, which city was laid waste by the Saxons and many precious Celtic MSS. destroyed.[25] It is a well-known fact of history that Melior and Alban suffered in the Diocletian persecution.

[23] Tertullian; Origen; Eusebius; Zozomen; Jerome; Theodoret and Socrates.

[24] F. E. Warren: *Lit. and Rit. of the Celtic Church,* p. 55.

[25] Beale Poste: *Britannic Researches,* pp. 191-2.

Dr. Mortimer Wheeler in his "Verulamiam" quotes a poem published in 1627 and headed "In Verulamium, A forgotten Citie". It runs:

> Stay thy foot that passest by
> Here is wonder to decry
> Churches that interr'd the dead,
> Here themselves are sepulchred,
> Houses where men slept and wak't
> Here in ashes under-rak't
> In a word to allude;
> Here is corne where once Troy stood;
> Or more fully home to have,
> Here's a Citie in a grave
> Reader, wonder thinke it then
> Cities thus would die like men;
> And yet wonder thinke it none
> Many Cities thus are gone.

The learned Ussher says of King Arthur: "He reformed the celebration of Divine worship, which had been nearly destroyed in the cities, villages and towns; he restored the churches which had been destroyed by the pagan Saxons, or were going to decay, and he took care to have proper bishops and pastors appointed to watch over the Churches, and to devote themselves to the study of religion."[26]

The Church government was that of presbyters and deacons acting in conjunction with their bishop. "From the honour and respect we paid in the earliest periods to the presbyters, acting in conjunction with their bishop, who scarce did anything in the admini-

[26] *Brit. Eccles. Antiq.*

stration and government of the Church without the advice, consent and amicable concurrence of his presbyters, it arose that they were allowed to sit together with the bishop in the Church, and their seats were dignified, with the name of thrones as the bishop's was; only with this difference, that his was the high and theirs the second ones; whence Constantine, following the custom of the Church, summoning Chrestus, Bishop of Syracuse, to the Council of Arles, bids him bring with him two of the second throne, that is the Presbyters."[27]

When the British ecclesiastics who were summoned by Constantine to the Council of Arles returned, they would bring with them for compliance in their churches the decision of the Council to adopt St. George as "The Champion Knight of Christendom". They would also bring many details, now lost, connected with the life and martyrdom of the soldier-saint which would be received in liberty-loving Britain with admiration and reverence. The Council was held but ten years after the martyrdom, and when, two hundred years later King Arthur adopted St. George as the "Patron and Protector" of his "Goodly Fellowship" he chose one whose name was already well known among the people, and whose example of courage and Christian service was upheld by the Churches as a beacon to urge on the faithful to greater endeavour. We have here valuable evidence of the sturdy character of the early British Church.

King Arthur's Charge to his Knights is clearly one of unselfish devotion to duty in which gentleness and valour are at once inculcated.

[27] Bingham: *Antiq. Eccles.* Bk. I Ch. 18.

## THE CHARGE

given by King Arthur to his Knights
when they were invested

God make you a good man and to fail not of beauty.

The Round Table was founded in patience, and in humility and in meekness.

Thou art never to do outrageously, nor murder, and always to flee treason, by no means to be cruel and always to do ladies, damosels and gentlewomen succour.

Also to take no battles in a wrongful quarrel for no law nor for no world's goods.

Thou must keep thy word to all and not be feeble of good belief and faith.

Right must be defended against might, and the distressed must be protected.

Thou must know good from evil and the vain glory of the world, because great pride and great bobance maketh great sorrow.

Should anyone require ye of any quest so that it is not to thy shame, thou should'st fulfil the desire.

Ever it is a worshipful knight's need to help another worshipful knight when he seeth him in great danger, for ever a worshipful man should be loath to see a worshipful man shamed, for it is only he that is of no worship and who fareth with cowardice that shall never show gentleness nor no manner of goodness when he seeth a man in any danger, but that always a good man will do ever to another man as he would be done to himself.

It should never be said that a sworn brother hath injured or slain another brother.

Thou should'st not fail in these things: charity, abstinence and truth.

No knight shall win worship but if he be of worship himself, and of good living and that loveth God and dreadeth God and that he getteth no worship be he ever so hardy.

An envious knight shall never win worship for an it happeth an envious man once to win worship he shall be dishonoured twice therefore, and for this cause all men of worship hate an envious man and will shew him no favour.

Do not, nor say not, anything that will in any way dishonour the fair name of Christian Knighthood, for only by stainless and honourable lives and not by prowess and courage shall the great goal be reached.

Therefore be a good knight and so I pray to God so ye may be, and if ye be of prowess and of worthiness ye shall be a knight of the Table Round.[28]

The death of King Arthur took place at Camlan in Cornwall in the year A.D. 542. His body was taken to Glastonbury for interment, "Queen Guinevere bade at her death that his body should be set beside her own when he shall end. Hereof have we the letters and her seal in this chapel of Glastonbury, and this place made she be builded new on this wise or ever she died."[29]

[28] See *Le Morte D'Arthur,* Globe Edition, p. 65.

[29] *High History of the Holy Grail,* p. 134.

From Froissart, the court chronicler of the time, we learn that it was a romantic pilgrimage Edward III and his young Queen Phillipa made to King Arthur and Queen Guinevere's tomb at Glastonbury which determined the Plantagenet monarch to refound the British Order of the Round Table, the Assemblies of Arthurian days and once again make Windsor the centre of European chivalry.

CHAPTER VI

# EDWARD III

It was in the reign of Edward III that the martyred St. George received his most lasting and enduring memorial in the refounding of the Order of St. George and the Garter. The idea, however, was that of his predecessor Richard Coeur de Lion. On the eve of his departure for the Crusades Richard held a council in the Great Hall at Winchester, and, assembling his barons around King Arthur's table delivered, for guidance in his absence, the interests of his kingdom to the keeping of William Longchamps. To distinguish his band of valiant knights from the other Crusaders Richard adopted the novel device of causing to be fastened to their legs blue thongs, "being what they had in readiness, by means of which, being minded of their future glory they might be stirred up to behave themselves valiantly".

It was natural that in the land of Palestine the renown of St. George should take fresh hold upon the minds of the Crusaders. "King Richárd vowed to refound the old British Order and make those of his followers 'Companions of St. George' who succeeded in a desperate attempt to scale the walls of Jerusalem. The cry 'For St. George' aroused the Crusaders to renewed energy and they advanced under the banner bearing his device, a red cross on a white ground, now first used by Richard I as the British ensign. 'From this time', states the Chronicle, 'all soldiers entering

battle shall have their common word and cry "St. George forward" or "Upon them St. George".' From Coeur de Lion's time to the sixteenth century the Red Cross of St. George was borne as a badge over the armour of an English soldier. Richard II son of the Black Prince and Henry V issued orders that every soldier should be distinguished by wearing the Red Cross of St. George."

As a thank offering for victory over the Moslems Richard Coeur de Lion rebuilt Constantine's Church at Lydda over the tomb of St. George which had been destroyed by the Persians and rebuilt by Justinian; destroyed by the Saracens and rebuilt by Richard, who replaced the ancient structure by an edifice 250 feet long and 200 feet wide. This Church was kept in repair with oak from the royal forests down to the time of Edward IV.

The photograph of the remains of Constantine's and Coeur de Lion's Church taken by the Palestine Exploration Society in 1875 is of exceptional interest now as these picturesque ruins are no longer visible.

The structure which replaced the original Church was probably that mentioned by Samuel Brett, one of the party, who recorded the "Travels of Fourteen Englishmen to Jerusalem in the year 1669". Upon taking their departure from Jerusalem to proceed to Bethlehem the writer says: "At a distance we saw St. George's Church where the Fathers say the chains remain wherewith St. George was bound."

Richard in 1190 remained for six weeks with his army at Lydda and passed through it the next year when returning from Jerusalem. He did not live to return to England and it was left to Edward III to

carry out his predecessor's cherished scheme for refounding the old British Order.

At the first Crusade the Conqueror's nephew, the Count of Flanders, received from the English under him the appellation "Fitz St. George" (son of St. George)—evidence not only of his soldierly qualities but of the knowledge of St. George and the veneration in which he was held in the army.

Edward I renewed the tournaments which had fallen into abeyance, and his Round Table at Kenilworth with a hundred knights clad in silk revived the ancient glories of King Arthur's Court.

Following Coeur de Lion's precedent the new Crusader king, Edward I, on the eve of his departure for the Holy Land assembled his knights in Council around Arthur's Table. At this Council the decision was taken and the order given that for the better preservation of this historic relic around which they were assembled it should be encircled with an iron tyre, and further that the Table should be placed in the gable of the Great Hall at Winchester Castle for a permanent memorial of those days of chivalry. There it remains today.[1]

The Table is seventeen feet in diameter and is one of our national treasures. In the centre is the rose of Sharon, which has always been associated with St. George.

"The modern Round Table conferences are a survival of this ancient form of procedure when important matters arise for discussion in the conduct of the state."[2]

[1] E. O. Gordon: *St. George, Champion of Christendom.*
[2] E. O. Gordon: *Pre-historic London.*

About one hundred years later Edward III modelled his "Order of St. George and the Garter" on the lines of King Arthur's Fraternity of Knighthood, having for its purpose "good fellowship". Richard Coeur de Lion's "blue thongs" were adopted as the badge of the "Most Honourable Order of Chivalry in Europe". The "blue thongs" took the form of a blue garter and remains the badge of the Order. Here we have the origin of the Order of the Garter; an origin far removed from that given it in the legend which connects it with the Countess of Salisbury having dropped a garter at the dance.

But there must have been a memory, a tradition, or a certain knowledge of an earlier society with the garter for its badge; in an ancient bardic poem the following lines appear:

"Drink; off Drink,
In honour of the great Pendragon.
Neighbours, welcome the elected
Man of the garter; leader of your ranks.
To the tything, honoured institution
Make a libation all its men.
To the illustrious Pen-dyke,
Illustrious leader, man of garter and collar."

Edward III empire and institution builder, established George of Lydda Patron Saint of England.

"The people of the Holy Land have always held St. George in great honour, and to this day the picture of him slaying the dragon is found in every Church. It was from them we English learned to honour him too for the Crusaders took him as their Patron or Chief Saint of England, and "St. George for England"

became the battle cry with which English soldiers charged to victory again and again. St. George lies buried at Lydda where his grave can still be seen. All the old pilgrims went to visit it and a great Feast was held there every year, the Feast of St. George, and it is kept up to this day. At one time Edward the Confessor was the Patron Saint of England, but King Richard, our great English Crusader altered that. It was well done, for certainly St. George the soldier is a better Patron of a fighting race than the meek and silent Confessor. And because he belonged first and still belongs to Palestine, having him for our Patron Saint is another link in the golden chain that joins the history of our England with that of the Holy Land.[3]

Having chosen the martyr-saint to be the guardian of his soldiers "Edward III caused his likeness to be painted mounted upon a lusty courser holding a white shield with a red cross, and gave to every one of his soldiers a white coat or cassock with a cross on each side, so that it was a seemly and magnificent thing to see the armies of the English to sparkle like the rising sunne, soldierie of other countries having no habit either to distinguish or adorn them."[4]

Froissart relates that on his return to England from France Edward III determined to carry out his solemn vow made at the tomb of King Arthur at Glastonbury to rebuild and embellish the great Castle of Windsor which King Arthur had founded, and whence so many knights had gone forth to display their prowess to all the world. He further desired to

[3] Estelle Blyth: *Jerusalem and the Crusades.*
[4] Camden: *Britannia.*

found an Order of Knighthood to be called the "Knights of the Blue Garter". The Knights were to be twenty-six in number and according to report and estimation the most valiant men in Christendom. Edward issued orders that the Feast of his new Fraternity should be celebrated every year at Windsor upon St. George's Day. His nobles heard it with great pleasure for it appeared to them highly honourable and capable of increasing love and friendship. On the surcoat and hood worn by the founder at the great celebration of St. George's Day in A.D. 1344 one hundred and sixty-eight garters with buckles and pendants were embroidered.[5]

The Order of the Garter originally included ladies who were known as "dames de la confraternité de St. George".

The Chapel of the Order, St. George's Chapel, upon which Edward III expended much care in every detail of its construction and for which this royal organiser "secured religious liberty for his Fraternity by obtaining from Pope Clement VI in 1348 a papal bull declaring the chapel of St. George a free Chapel, i.e. free of papal control and jurisdiction".

"Two years later in 1350 on St. George's Day, April 23rd, at the altar of the newly built chapel of the Order, five and twenty knights of England, headed by their gallant sovereign offered their arms to God and dedicated themselves to His service."[6]

Dean Hook describes the opening religious and dedicatory ceremony: "At the west door of St. George's Chapel the Primate of all England, Simon

[5] Ashmole: *Order of the Garter.*
[6] E. O. Gordon: *St. George, Champion of Christendom.*

Islip, in full pontificals and wearing the pall, was standing to receive the Sovereign and the twenty-five Knights Companions who in solemn procession had issued forth in grand array bare-headed from the Round Tower. The Archbishop there pronounced that blessing on the Institution which still attaches to the Order, that everything was ordained to remind the Knights of their being Christian men engaged to maintain, wherever they may be, the cause of Christ. The Garter was to represent the importance of unity among the Knights, and each Knight was to bind it on his knee to be warned that in battle he should never flee. The motto was to suggest to them that nothing unseemly was to be done by a Knight, while the image of St. George was to instigate him to the acts of a hero. His purple robe indicated that the Knight was the equal of Kings; the collar always of the same weight with the same number of links was a witness of the bond of faith, of peace, of unity. They were called Companions of the Order to declare their readiness in peace and war to act as brethren and with one accord. . . . The King with the Knights received the Holy Communion, devoting themselves to the service of God and the maintenance of truth and the resistance of all wrong doers."[1]

The formula used by the King at the ceremony of initiation bears out the high ideals to which the Knights were urged to aspire: "In the name of God and Saint George I dub thee Knight, loyally to uphold faith and justice, and to protect the Church, and women, widows and orphans."

Our forefathers, it is clear from historical records,

[1] *Lives of the Archbishops.*

brought religion to bear upon every action of their lives, and in the customs which contributed to the term "Merrie England" there was ever the recognition of duty to God and service to their country.

The Order of the Garter as instituted by Edward III included canons and other church dignitaries, and also poor knights pensioners who were to be maintained at Windsor.[8]

Hepworth Dixon says of Windsor Castle: "The heights all around the Norman keep are capped with fame . . . one hallowed by a saint, another crowned with song, . . . St. George is hardly more a presence in the place than Chaucer and Shakespeare, Edward and Victoria. Edward III in introducing a new Patron Saint to Windsor removed his own lodging and renounced the lower ward entirely to St. George. First came the Chapel of St. George, next came the College of St. George, then came the Canons of St. George, lastly came the Poor Knights of St. George."[9]

It is recorded that every Companion of the Order of St. George was enjoined to wear his mantle from the first vespers on St. George's Eve until the second vespers on the morrow wheresoever he might be, whether in the country or without. No knight might enter St. George's Chapel or assist at a chapel of the Order without wearing his "liverie".

"On St. George's Day, 1553, Edward VI the frail spiritually minded young monarch of sixteen sat in a room at Greenwich overlooking the river. Ill health had prevented his attendance at the service held in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. In accordance with

[8] Ashmole: *Order of the Garter.*
[9] *Royal Windsor.*

the original rules of the Order when a Knight-Companion was prevented attending the feast in person 'wheresoever he might be' all his 'paraphanalia' was laid out before him, his habit and blue velvet mantle, and the 'jewels' as the garter and collar were called. The office of the Order was said before the pious Edward. The King, after the sermon, said to those about him: 'My lords, pray ye, what saint is St. George that we have so honoured him?' " The Marquess of Winchester then told him the legend of St. George slaying the dragon with his sword. The King fell a laughing and could not for a while speak. Probably Edward VI had succeeded as Sovereign to be a Knight-Companion of the Order without going through the formal investiture in St. George's Chapel and had never heard the beautiful words of admonition said when the collar was put about the neck of a knight. The collar of the Order is said to have had its origin in the chain put around Joseph's neck by Pharaoh. Be that as it may the collar is the oldest form of personal decoration in the world.

Henry VII proved to be one of the most zealous of the English kings in support of St. George and the Order of the Garter, which had undergone slight changes in the centuries since Edward III's time in the costumes and organisation.[10]

Charles I is said to have been the "Great Increaser of the honour and renown of this most illustrious Order" and to have studied every detail of King Arthur's method, as well as that of Edward III for inculcating courtesy and good manners.[11]

[10] Ashmole: *Order of the Garter.*
[11] E. O. Gordon: *St. George, Champion of Christendom.*

Of the "Order of St. George and the Garter" Shakespeare wrote :

"When first this Order was ordained, my lords
Knights of the Garter were of noble birth.
Valiant and virtuous, full of haughty courage
Such as were grown to credit in the wars;
Not fearing death, nor shrinking for distress
But always resolute in most extremes.
He that is not furnished in this sort
Doth but usurp the sacred name of knight,
Profaning this most Honourable Order."

The Order of St. George and the Garter remains the highest Order of Knighthood in Great Britain. The original number of knights, twenty-six, is still retained except that by statute passed in 1786 princes of the blood are admitted as supernumerary members.

The Garter was originally light blue silk, with the motto set in pearls, rubies and diamonds. It is now of dark blue velvet about an inch wide with the motto set in gold letters. The mantle has on the shoulder the badge of the Order, namely, a velvet escutcheon charged with the red cross of St. George and encircled with the garter and motto. The costume is very rich and is completed by a chain that consists of twenty-six pieces in which interlaced knots of cords interlace with roses (the rose of Sharon), each surrounded with the garter and its motto. Pendant from one of the roses is St. George piercing the dragon.

The oath taken when a knight is invested :

"You being chosen to be one of the honourable Company of the most noble Order of the Garter shall promise and swear by the Holy Evangelists,

by you here touched, that wittingly and willingly you shall not break any statute of the said Order, or any article in them contained, the same being agreeable and not repugnant to the Laws of Almighty God and the laws of this realm, as far forth as to you belongeth and appertaineth, so help you God and his Holy Word."

The portrait of the founder of the Order in the vestry of the Royal Chapel of St. George has, on the frame, a Latin inscription "Edward the Third, the unconquerable King of England. Founder of this Chapel and of the Most Noble Order of the Garter"

It is significant that the King's sword thrust through two crowns and with the one on his head a third are the British King Coel's arms at Colchester. An historical link is thus made with King Coel's daughter, the Empress Helena and her son Constantine and with St. George whose staunch friend Constantine was, and through whose proposal and influence the memory of the noble saint's life remains with us to this day.

Dean Baillie in his Foreword to *St. George's Chapel* states: "I think the most romantic thing of all is the great sword which hangs huge and stark behind the Altar, in the Ambulatory. The sword of Edward III, the man who stood at the moment in English history when Saxons, and Normans and Danes became Englishmen in the strenuous efforts of his wars; the man who founded the Order to which the Chapel belongs, and left his mark on English thought and purpose in the idea of chivalry which he enshrined in the whole foundation."[12]

[12] H. W. Blackburne: *St. George's Chapel.*

A more perfect knowledge of the individuality and character of George of Lydda reveals that this great hero is worthy to have his memory perpetuated in the Order to which by hereditary right our monarchs belong. When the peasant natives of countries under Eastern influence are interrogated as to the origin of the great and stately buildings of which astonishing and interesting ruins still remain they declare that they are the work of Genii. In like manner the untaught of our own land believe that the tradition of St. George is a relic of a magical figure whose memory is kept alive more because of the picturesque than for any solid historic truth behind the tradition.

The dignity inherent in the "Order of the Garter" has, to educated minds, secured to our Patron Saint a position far transcending the legends of mythical heroes and medieval saints.

CHAPTER VII

# ST. GEORGE THE PATRON

"For thou amongst those saints whom thou doest see
Shalt be a saint and thine own nation's friend
And Patrone; thou St. George shalt be
St. George of merry England, the signe of victory."[1]

In old State and Civic records and Corporation and Church accounts endless references are found to the cult of St. George.

The first Order in which St. George is said to have been honoured is described by Ashmole (A.D. 1672) and is called "The Order of Constantinian's Angelic Knights of St. George".[2]

St. George had a place in an Anglo-Saxon ritual of Durham assigned to the sixth century and mentioned by Bede.[3]

In pre-conquest times a monastery and church dedicated to St. George at Fordington in Dorset is mentioned in King Alfred's will. The monastery at Thelford founded by Canute was dedicated to St. George.

In A.D. 1072 Robert D'Oyley, a Norman noble who had been granted large estates in Oxfordshire by William the Conqueror built near his castle a parish

[1] Edmund Spenser: *The Faerie Queene.*
[2] *Order of the Garter.*
[3] *Lives of the Saints.*

church dedicated to St. George. This further indicates that the Normans were acquainted with the history of St. George before their arrival in England.

In A.D. 1222 St. George's Day, April 23rd, was ordered to be kept as a holiday of the lesser rank. In 1415 his festival was made a major double feast and was ordained to be observed like Christmas Day.

The red cross of St. George was written large across the countryside of medieval England. The influence of his cult was not confined to the nobles but acted upon by the whole people.

The memory of the soldier-martyr is perpetuated in the British National Flag of which the red cross of St. George is the foundation; overlaid with the cross of St. Andrew and the cross of St. Patrick. Commenting on this C. J. Marcus expresses the truth that this complete symbol is the most glorious under which a Christian nation can reach its destiny.[4]

The Guilds of St. George celebrated their saint by processions or "Ridings".[5] The national devotion to St. George is reflected in the plays of Shakespeare and also in the arts and crafts of the people. The inventory of the Earl of Leicester's chattels in 1588 contains the following item: "a knyfe case. George on horseback of woode painted and gilte, with a case for knyves in the tail of the horse and a case for oyster knyves in the breast of the dragon".[6]

A favourite name for an inn was very properly that of the Patron Saint. The "George" Inn at Glastonbury dates from the fifteenth century. Many in Sussex belong to the sixteenth century, and in Kent over

[4] C. J. Marcus: *St. George of England,* p. 110.
[5] Hulst: *St. George,* p. 72.
[6] Milton Waldman: *Elizabeth and Leicester,* p. 17.

sixty inns are called after St. George.

The soldier-saint is depicted over the Royal entrance to the House of Lords and on the ceiling of the main corridor leading to the House of Commons.

In the realm of numismatics our Patron Saint finds a place of honour. The noble, a gold coin of the value of six shillings and eight pence issued in the reign of Edward III was re-issued in the reign of Henry VIII at the same value and named the George-noble from the figure of St. George slaying the dragon depicted on the obverse. This coin was, perhaps, the most notable contribution in this reign to the soldier-saint's memory.

In the first prayer-book of Edward VI, April 23rd was a red-letter day and had a special epistle and gospel appointed, but this was changed in the revision, and presently the King promulgated certain statutes severing the connection between the saint and the Noble Order of the Garter, keeping the Order but making an attempt to separate the romantic features from the religious. On the accession of Queen Mary these statutes were at once abrogated as "impertinent and tending to novelty". The festival then continued to be observed until 1567 when the ceremonies being thought incompatible with the reformed religion Queen Elizabeth ordered its discontinuance.

The cavaliers would have revived the celebrations of St.George's Day but this was prevented by the Civil War. It was long the fashion for gentlemen to wear a blue coat on St. George's Day in imitation of the blue mantle worn by the Knights of St. George, but this custom was never strongly revived.

At the time of the Reformation it became the

custom to laugh at the saints and deny their existence. The fact that St. George was held in the highest esteem in many countries in Europe made him most obnoxious to Martin Luther (1483-1546). Calvin called him a "hobgoblin".[7]

"It is a little surprising that these irate theologians, who must have been very learned men, did not take the trouble to examine the history of St. George critically and show in a cool and judicial fashion the absurdities of many of the legends which had gathered about and overlaid the story of his martyrdom."[8]

St. George having been classed as a mythical saint by Calvin and others began to decline in popularity; the views of the Reformers were very widely adopted by Protestants.

Peter Heylyn (A.D. 1633) who wrote for Charles I as an Anglican apologist to prove that St. George was not a mere myth, undertook "To clear the history of St. George from all further questions", and continues, "In this more neat and curious age, there are many who do peevishly reject these ancient stories which are commended to us in the best and gravest authors. I say not this to blunt the edge of any virtuous endeavours—only I say'd it a little to take downe, if possible, that height of selfe-conceit and stomacke wherewith too many of us do affront those worthies of former days."

In England there are one hundred and sixty-two churches dedicated to St. George, a fact which, alone, would keep the memory of the soldier-saint alive in our midst. "England has established him throughout the earth; on every ocean we have borne his flag, on

[7] De Idol Rom. I cap. 5.
[8] Sir Wallis Budge: *St. George of Lydda*, p. 17.

every island we have reared his fame. We gave his name to St. George's Channel, the stormy inlet of the Irish Sea. The direst peril on the Atlantic Ocean we have called St. George's Bank. From Behring Straits to Maine, from Florida to Patagonia we have set him up on guard. When we were mapping out the Land of Desolation in the Indian Ocean we named the rockiest headland of that territory Cape St. George, and the old name of Madras was Fort St. George. This nomenclature is not a thing of the past by any means. Penang, Tasmania and Western Australia keep up the memory of the soldier-martyr, St. George, the Patron Saint of England."[9]

The spirit of St. George is with us still; it is seen in the behaviour of our fighting personnel on the sea, on land and in the air, and in the unity of purpose, courage and endurance of our people. Of this the familiar figure, St. George in conflict with the dragon, is a fitting symbol.

The British temper of self-discipline and restraint, the spirit of generous chivalry and the individual effort for the common weal which marks all great crises in our national life does not weaken with the passage of time; rather is there a strengthening of the spiritual qualities upon which these characteristics are founded.

This suggests the hope that under the British flag founded upon the cross of St. George, under the Anglo-Saxon banners, the English-speaking peoples will be led to the victory of the ideals which they all share; the victory will also be shared with the non-English-speaking peoples who will have found in Anglo-Saxon countries Justice, Liberty and Peace.

[9] Hepworth Dixon: *Royal Windsor.*

"Dumbly their plumage fans the gale
With silent gold their steeds are shod
Who noiseless ride in mystic mail
The immortal chivalry of God.
Each in his office is not slow
To wage the spiritual war
Nor least, where'er the English go
The good Saint George goes on before."

Staunch warriors of the Cross would tell
How battling under Syrian skies
As he on whom the mantle fell,
They saw the saint in arms of light
With steed of fire and lance of flame
They saw, and kindling at the sight
Hurled back the heathen in his name.

This was the name that greatly rang
When England greatly stood at bay,
And blithe the English bow string sang
On Cressy slope that August day.
This was the flag that danced and flew
Exultant o'er the plunging main,
Where them we spared, the storm wind slew
And wherefor not?

Let him deride whose soul with coarser sense
is blurred,
For England loves that unseen guide
Sent forth to work his Master's word,
Who sleeplessly by land and wave
Hath kept her, and shall keep her thus,
Strong servant of the God who gave
His angels charge concerning us.[10]

[10] Frank Taylor: *The Gallant Way.*

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